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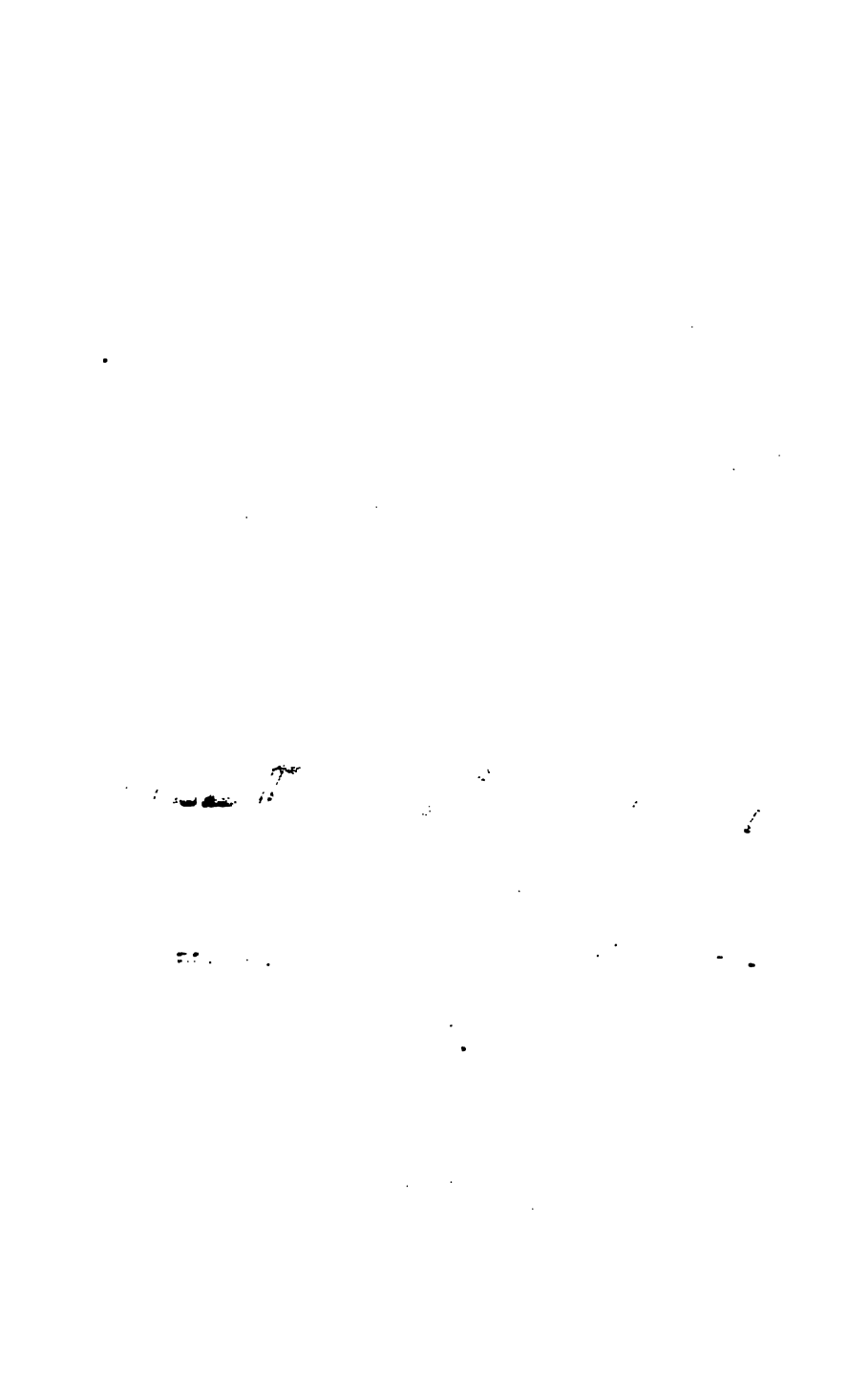
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LANETON PARSONAGE.

VOL. II.



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LANETON PARSONAGE:

A Tale for Children

ON THE

PRACTICAL USE OF A PORTION OF THE

CHURCH CATECHISM.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "AMY HERBERT," ETC.

~~~~~  
Oh ! say not, dream not, heavenly notes  
To childish ears are vain,—  
That the young mind at random floats,  
And cannot reach the strain.

Dim or unheard the words may fall,  
And yet the heaven-taught mind  
May learn the sacred air, and all  
The harmony unwind.

THE CHRISTIAN YEAR.

~~~~~  
EIGHTH EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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LANETON PARSONAGE.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT were Ruth's feelings during the course of that busy day? It is a question difficult to answer. Ruth could not have answered it herself. But they know, who, like her, having sunk in their own esteem by the commission of an undetected fault, are too proud to own their offence, but too conscientious to endure still to listen to words of approbation, and who pass through the necessary routine of occupation with a heavy heart, a dull abstracted look, a weary spirit of indifference, whilst hiding in their own breasts the bitter sense of shame.

Ruth was pitied for her headache when it was known that she had one; her lessons were excused; she was allowed to stay by herself in the drawing-room and read. Delicacies were provided for her; Mrs. Carter came to sit with her, and talk to her; Miss Barnard took trouble to make her comfortable. Madeline looked really anxious; and Ruth grew more and more wretched; her only satisfaction being the miserable one of knowing that Mary Vernon, who was gone to spend a few days with a friend, was not at hand to remark upon and inquire into her unhappiness. The first idea of discovering Clara's fault Ruth had entirely given up. She could not do it. Clara must follow her own plans; she must corrupt the minds of others; she must disobey Mrs. Carter; Ruth must

know it and be silent,—and why? Because Ruth was too sincere to accuse another of a fault in which she had in a measure participated; and yet could not own herself wrong, and risk Mrs. Carter's displeasure, and the loss of her position in the school. There was but one thing now to be done; to restore the book to its hiding-place, and say nothing. Ruth heartily wished that she had done so at once. By giving way to the impulse of fear, she had increased her own perplexities tenfold. Whilst the book remained in Janet Harding's drawer, there was no safety for any one; yet how to restore it was a great difficulty. She was sure that Clara had missed it,—but a few words overheard in the course of the day made her aware that it was supposed to have been possibly mislaid. She must therefore take advantage of the first opportunity to replace it. And there were several opportunities Ruth thought. Several times she tried to find an excuse for going up stairs to fetch something, but each time Mrs. Carter chose to send some one else; not wishing, as she said, that Ruth should trouble herself when her head was so bad. The day passed over, evening came, Ruth found herself alone in the drawing-room, in the twilight. She did not like to be alone, especially when it was growing dusk. It made her nervous to watch the gradual fading of the light; to find the objects about her growing indistinct; to have less and less to distract her thoughts. That is one blessing of night when we choose to make use of it. It shuts out the objects which disturb us by day. It brings before us the reality of God's presence; the awfulness of His purity and holiness. It is as when we look into the purple sky, and see the pale stars shining from afar, and the moon traversing the infinity of space. There they were when the sun shone brightly, when the glare of the day wearied us, when we walked through crowded streets, and trans-

acted the business of life with our fellow-men. There they were, pure and unchangeable, passing on their wondrous way, but we saw them not. And there also was He who made them; present in the cheerful home, in the noisy town, in the crowded shop. We saw not the calm moon, we did not look for the glittering star, and neither did we think of the God who was watching over us, whose Eye was upon our secret thoughts. Now, darkness has fallen upon the earth, and Heaven is open before us; and with the sight of Heaven, shall not the remembrance likewise return of Him who is its Maker and its Lord?

Ruth trembled in the twilight. But let us not be mistaken; it is dangerous to think lightly of any fault, but it is also dangerous to magnify what we have done wrong beyond what it really deserves. Ruth's fault, as has been said before, would have been of a less serious nature if she had only possessed the courage to confess it. It was her pride which was the great evil. When Ruth thought of what she had done with the idea of acknowledging it, her heart for an instant grew light. She knew that Mrs. Carter would be vexed, but she knew also that she would forgive. It was only when she dwelt upon the consequences of her confession; the probability, the almost certainty, that it would cause Mrs. Carter to doubt her steadiness of principle, and lower her in the opinion of her companions, and interfere with her being chosen judge, that she really became perplexed how to act. Now she sat in the twilight thinking; very unhappy, very unwell; her head throbbing violently, longing for bed time, yet afraid that if she did go to bed she should not be able to sleep. Below, there were the usual school sounds: laughter, voices, a piano, and a harp. Ruth almost resolved to go down; anything was better than staying alone. She wondered Madeline did not come to her, she thought it unkind. Presently there

was a sudden lull ; the music stopped in the middle of a bar ; there was a rush as if all were collecting together to hear something ; then a single voice spoke, and immediately afterwards Madeline ran up the staircase. She burst eagerly into the room, but checked herself, and said in a gentle tone,

"Ruth, dear, I forgot ; I hope I did not disturb you."

"No, not at all, thank you," replied Ruth, "I have been expecting you some time ; why did you not come before?"

"Because—indeed, I did not forget you Ruth ; I wanted to come to you very much ; but I fancied it would be better to wait till it was all settled, because you would like to hear."

"Settled ! what ?" inquired Ruth.

"Oh ! I must tell you all from the beginning ; but you won't be in a hurry, will you ? We were talking down stairs about Anna, and Mary, and who should be judge, and a great many of them said you ; only Clara set her face against it." Ruth grasped the arm of her chair with an energy of feeling, which she could not control.

"Clara objected," continued Madeline, "and so did some of the others, and Harriet Trevelyan was proposed, and then we all laughed ; and one or two others were mentioned, and some one said it would be pleasant to have a regular choosing day, and a box with votes, and to settle before we went home, because if any new girls came next half-year, they would not enter into it ; and we thought it would be nice to have Mary Vernon here, and in short, to do it all regularly and properly ; and at last, we settled it delightfully, and they sent me to the study to ask Mrs. Carter about it ; and she called Miss Barnard, and they talked together, and at last they sent for me again, and told me we might, and I ran in to the parlour just to let them know, and

then I came up stairs to you. Oh! Ruth; won't it be charming?"

"Yes, very," replied Ruth, in a faint voice.

"Ah! you don't care for it to night; your poor head is bad; but you will to-morrow; and it concerns you more than any one; of course you will be chosen."

"Not of course, if Clara has her way," said Ruth, in a bitter tone.

"Oh! that is all nonsense," answered Madeline, "Clara can do nothing against you; you are such a favourite. And Mrs. Carter thinks you will be judge, I am sure, because she smiled so, and said to Miss Barnard, that I seemed particularly interested in the matter."

Ruth could not bring herself to answer, but Madeline's head being full of the subject, she was contented to run on by herself, describing what they meant to do, and how they were to arrange the school-room, and how each one was to write the name of the party she preferred upon a card; and how when the election was over, they were to enjoy themselves by having a holiday, and, if it was fine, a fête in the garden.

Ruth said "yes," and "no," and "very pleasant," at intervals, and with this Madeline was satisfied.

The subject of the brooch and the secret connected with it, was not once alluded to; Ruth remembered it but dared not approach a topic which she felt convinced was connected with the hidden book, and Madeline's conscience being clear, she had soon ceased to dwell upon it.

The sisters remained talking together till it was quite dark, and Ruth expressed a wish to go to bed. Madeline went to ask Mrs. Carter's permission,—but Mrs. Carter was busy, and she was detained some time before she could speak with her, and just as she

had given Ruth's request to Miss Barnard instead, the bell rang for prayers, and Miss Barnard settled the question, by saying that Ruth had better come down to prayers, and go to bed with the rest. This was but a trifling circumstance, yet it was very important to Ruth. It prevented her from replacing the book, and caused her an additional anxiety. Mrs. Carter kissed her very affectionately when she went to wish her good night; and said she should come and see her after she was in bed. She trusted the headache would be better to-morrow, for every one was grieved when Ruth was ill; she was so kind and useful.

Ruth longed,—yes, she longed intensely, to unburthen her heart; to rid herself of the oppressive weight of her secret and her fault. But the acknowledgment—that was the stumbling-block, and Ruth went to her room silent, and very sad.

"Alice," said Madeline, the next morning, just before breakfast, "do you know Mrs. Carter means to look at the account books to-day?"

Alice's face grew a little pale. "Does she? she will not find mine right, I never try to keep them so."

"Mine would be right, if it were not for that eighteen-pence. I cannot imagine what is become of it. I never knew any thing so strange.

Alice could not find a word to reply; she waited an instant, and then inquired how Ruth's head was. She had a vague idea still of talking to Ruth; of acknowledging every thing to her. If Ruth had been one degree less perfect in her eyes, she might have done so before, but she feared her look of utter astonishment at such naughtiness.

Madeline replied that Ruth's head was better, but she did not look at all well, and Mrs. Carter and Miss Barnard both had remarked it. Madeline

hoped that Ruth would be quite well soon. It would destroy all the pleasure of choosing the judge if she were not, and some one had said that most probably the day would be fixed almost directly. Alice expressed neither pleasure, nor hope, nor fear. How cold and dull it makes us to do wrong,—to have any evil to conceal! There were several subjects of interest mentioned at the breakfast table; the choice of a judge, the different prizes, the holidays, the various journeys. Ruth took no part in the conversation; she was meditating in what way to find an excuse for going again to her room. Clara took no part in it; she was wondering and fearing what could have been done with the lost volume. Alice took no part in it; she was humbled and conscience-stricken at the sense of her own meanness. “There will just be time for me to look at the account books, before Monsieur Le Vergnier comes,” said Mrs. Carter, as she rose from the breakfast table. “I should wish those who have tried to keep them correctly, to bring them to my study.” This order was of no consequence to many. It was an affair of choice whether accounts should be kept or not. Madeline took her book reluctantly from her desk. It was neatly written, correctly added up. It was the first occasion on which she had, upon the whole, tried to do her best in being regular and careful: but the unfortunate eighteenpence made all wrong. She lamented it again and again; first to Ruth, then to Janet Harding, then again to Alice, and every word was sharp and piercing to Alice’s conscience, until the effort at hiding her feelings became almost more than she could bear.

Madeline went to the study, with a face which was a clear sign of her emotion. She knocked, but

received no answer,—and knocked again. Still there was no reply; and she waited, leaning against the wall, and not knowing whether it would be right to open the door and go in. There was a ring at the bell, which she knew to be Monsieur Le Vergnier's, and from the sounds she guessed that some one was with him. Immediately afterwards, Clara Manners ran out from the school-room, and passing the study door, went into the entrance hall. Madeline heard her speak, and knew the voice that answered; it was Justine's. Monsieur Le Vergnier went into the school-room. Justine and Clara remained talking together. Madeline thought it would be better to go away, but at that instant, Mrs. Carter appeared from another part of the house. She listened, and asked who was in the hall. Madeline told, and Mrs. Carter desiring her to wait in the study, went on. Madeline remained as she was directed, though rather impatient, for she wanted to go back to her lessons. It seemed strange, that Mrs. Carter should stay so long. The study door was open, and presently, to her surprise, Clara came into the passage alone. Her face was clouded with anger and pride. Her eye caught Madeline's, and she said in an under tone: "You have your will now; it is all over with us."

"What! how, Clara?" exclaimed Madeline.

Clara caught away the corner of her dress which Madeline held, and instead of going into the school-room, rushed up the stairs to her room; closing the door with a sharp echoing sound.

Madeline was frightened. Clara's words were an enigma; but Clara's face was quite pale. Something wrong had been discovered; there was no doubt of that. For some minutes longer Madeline waited in vain; and then being summoned to Mon-

sieur Le Vergnier, she left her account book open on the study table and went away.

Clara Manners was asked for many times as the French lesson began. It was proposed to send for her, but a message from Miss Barnard stopped all questions, though it did not stop curiosity. "Miss Barnard's compliments to Monsieur Le Vergnier, Miss Manners would not be able to take her lesson that morning." Ruth's cheek became of a bright crimson when she heard this, but the colour was soon gone and she continued her lessons as before.

"Justine! où est Justine? ma fille?" asked Monsieur Le Vergnier, in the course of the lesson.

The question created some surprise. "What! was Justine come?" No one had seen her. "It was not usual for her to come without being invited in school hours."

"But this morning," Monsieur Le Vergnier said, "she told him that she had particular business; however, it did not signify, she must be gone home;—it did not signify," and he shrugged his shoulders and went on teaching.

Madeline was the only one who doubted whether it did not signify. Miss Barnard sat in the school-room keeping strict order and silence, and looked very severe. Monsieur Le Vergnier's politeness was thrown away upon her; she paid him the necessary civilities, and nothing more, and when he rose to depart her bow was colder, more unbending than ever.

"Miss Madeline Clifford is wanted in the study," said Dawson, coming to the school-room door.

Madeline rose instantly. Alice whispered, "What is the matter?" but Madeline put her finger to her lips, and hastened to obey. Once more she stood before the study and knocked, and there was a quiet cold answer, "Come in."

Mrs. Carter was alone, sitting in her usual position in the arm chair by the side of the table. Her finger rested upon Madeline's account-book ; another book, shabby and dirty, lay near. On a chair, in one corner, was Justine le Vergnier's bonnet.

"Madeline," said Mrs. Carter, fixing her mild but searching eye upon her, "this is your book, I believe."

"Yes, ma'am, my account-book. I left it here this morning."

"I have been looking at it ; it is not right."

"No, ma'am," replied Madeline, boldly. "It is wrong by eighteenpence. I cannot tell how."

"You cannot tell ? But you must have some idea. You have kept all the rest so carefully, you must have some notion what you have done with it."

"No," Madeline had none whatever ; and whilst owning this she blushed deeply.

Mrs. Carter repeated, still looking at her steadily, "You are quite sure you have not lent it ? quite certain ?"

Madeline could not be certain. Mrs. Carter's manner, without her intending it, confused and distressed her.

Mrs. Carter considered a little, and then said more kindly, though still with something of restraint, "Very well, my dear ; you may go."

Madeline departed, much more uncomfortable than she came. She went back to the school-room ; the usual lessons were going on ; reading, geography, practising. Madeline took her share in each, yet still her thoughts wandered. What could that strange short interview mean ? Where was Clara ? Why was Justine's bonnet in the study ? How provoking it was that she could not talk to Ruth ! Madeline looked anxiously at Ruth as she thought this. There had been something in her sister's face all the morn-

ing which perplexed her. It was a look of suffering; yet Ruth had said that she was nearly well. One o'clock—lessons were over—silence ceased; and talking—such talking began. So fast! so eager! so confused! Each one bent upon speaking for herself. Madeline sat down by Ruth, and passed her hand affectionately over her forehead, and kissed her, and called her her own dear Ruth, and wished she was quite well; it was wretched to see her so changed. The faint smile which played upon Ruth's features made her real feelings only the more visible.

"May I talk a little to you, Ruth?" continued Madeline, "I want to tell you about some things very much."

Ruth gave a quiet assent, and resting her forehead upon her hand, listened whilst Madeline related what had passed during the morning. When she came to Clara's words, "It is all over with us now," Ruth started, and Madeline stopped, and asked if she was in pain. But Ruth's calm reply was, "No, thank you; go on." And Madeline went on.

"Can you guess? can you think, Ruth, what is the matter?" she said, as she concluded.

Ruth shook her head; she could not utter a falsehood.

"It was the same book, I am nearly certain," continued Madeline, "which I saw upon the study table, that Florence Trevelyan said belonged to her, on that day when Justine gave me the brooch. I meant to have told you all about that, only we have been thinking of other things. By the by, where is Florence?"

Missing;—Harriet was missing also; both had been sent for during the morning lessons. Their absence was generally remarked, every one was whispering and looking, for it was becoming evident that a secret there was somewhere.

"Dinner will be ready in a minute," said Madeline, finding that Ruth was little inclined for conversation. "Wont you come into the dressing-room and get ready?"

Ruth had no appetite for dinner: she would much rather have remained where she was; but she dreaded to attract notice, and went with Madeline, and tried to join in the general observations, and to be as little unlike herself as possible. Still it was remarked how ill and pale Ruth looked, and some feared that if she were not better all the pleasure of the election day would be over. Pleasure was spoken of, but there was not much cheerfulness in the tone of the party, the idea of a secret weighing upon all, upon one especially besides Ruth. Alice knew quite well what was going on. She felt herself less guilty than the others; she had not given way entirely to temptation; and she hoped that whatever might be found out she might obtain forgiveness; but her mean dishonourable conduct to Madeline was not to be forgotten. Once or twice she thought she must tell her, even though it might be the means of bringing herself into disgrace as a partaker in the fault of the others. This was especially the case when she heard Madeline mention the account-book, and again express her sorrow and surprise at the mistake or loss, about which she said Mrs. Carter appeared very much annoyed. Alice felt then, that although she might repay the money, she was still dishonest.

The dinner passed very silently. Clara, Florence, and Harriet were absent. Only one thing of importance happened. Some one mentioned the next day but one as desirable for the election of the judge, because Fanny Wilson was going home the day after, and would be vexed to miss it. Mrs. Carter became very grave, and did not instantly reply; but after a pause she said, "they might choose their own day,—

it might be the one named if they wished it." But this cold consent was not at all what was desired. Generally speaking, Mrs. Carter took a great interest in all their pleasures; now it seemed an effort to her to attend to anything. Grace was said; the cloth removed; the servants had left the room; and the benches being pushed back, a general move followed for all to return to the school-room. Mrs. Carter spoke.—"Stay, my dears; all of you," and every voice was hushed, every movement stopped.—"I wish to speak to you all; I have something particular to say." Mrs. Carter's words came one by one, as if dragged from her; and those who ventured to look in her face, saw that its expression was unusual. A pause, so long as to alarm even the most innocent and indifferent, succeeded. Madeline stood by Ruth, and noticed that she caught the arm of a chair near, and grasped it firmly, whilst Alice twisted a silk chain which hung round her neck, till it was thoroughly entangled. Madeline's own heart beat quickly, but she looked up without shrinking; for what had she to conceal?

Mrs. Carter continued:—"Some of you, I hope many, are doubtless quite unprepared for what I am going to say. There are others, I fear, whose consciences will at once accuse them. Before I proceed further, I wish all to understand that to confess a fault freely is the surest road to forgiveness."

Stillness! so that a pin might have been heard to fall; yet in the stillness, Madeline heard Ruth's quick, irregular breathing.

Mrs. Carter waited for an answer in vain, and again she spoke rapidly—for her—firmly, almost abruptly.—"One of my strictest rules—one about which I am most anxious, has been broken. Books have been introduced into the house without my knowledge. This one"—and the volume of the novel

which Madeline had seen in the study was laid upon the table—"this book, which it is a disgrace for any lady to look into, was found this morning in the hands of Mademoiselle Le Vergnier. I say nothing with regard to her conduct; her foreign education must be her excuse. Those who have joined with her can plead no such excuse." Mrs. Carter's eye passed slowly from one to the other. It rested anxiously upon Madeline, doubtfully upon Alice, and to Ruth she said, kindly, "Sit down, my dear; you look as if your head ached terribly."

"I might," continued Mrs. Carter, "question you all separately as to your knowledge of this business. I might in that way more certainly discover the truth; but I would rather be open with you, as I trust you will be with me. I mean to tell you all that I know, and then, I hope I am not mistaken in believing that even those who have done wrong will be too honourable to conceal it. This morning, as I before said, I found this book accidentally—I ought rather to say Providentially—in the hands of Mademoiselle Le Vergnier. It was brought for Clara Manners and Harriet and Florence Trevelyan." This announcement created no surprise; but Alice marvelled how her name should have escaped. "So far," pursued Mrs. Carter, "there is no doubt; the parties have themselves confessed their fault. How painful it was to me to hear their confession, to feel that I could no longer place confidence in them, I will not attempt to describe. At first I believed that the evil ended with them, but I was mistaken; there are two others, who have been named as having a knowledge, at least, that the practice of reading books by stealth was carried on in the school. Alice, I appeal to you—and Madeline." Madeline's colour rose in a sudden glow of indignation. In an instant she had stepped forward from the circle, and was

standing alone before Mrs. Carter. Alice looked around her hurriedly, and her limbs shook, and her lips moved, but she did not utter a word. "Before I hear what you have to say," added Mrs. Carter, "I would remind you, and not you only but all, that in a case like the present, any confession which is not strictly true is an injury to others as well as to yourselves. If you are not thoroughly sincere, it is almost impossible but that some one should be accused unjustly. I know you would be shocked at the idea of accusing any one falsely by words. I earnestly pray that you may not be induced to do so by silence. Now, Alice, let me hear what you can tell me." A general hush of expectation followed this command. Every glance was directed to Alice; even Madeline turned round, forgetful of her own painful position, in her anxiety to discover how far Alice was involved in Clara's offence.

And what could Alice say? what did she say? She began plainly, simply, acknowledging that she had joined with Clara by reading a part of one book, on one occasion, and that on a Sunday afternoon; but denying any further participation in the fault. "Clara," she said, "had requested her to join, but believing that it was against Mrs. Carter's wishes, she had constantly declined." So far all was strictly true, and Mrs. Carter's face grew more cheerful, and twice she smiled a smile of approbation, as Alice repeated that she knew she had done wrong at first, but she was sorry for it, and had tried very much to avoid following Clara's example. If Alice could have told the same tale of struggle against temptation even to the end, she need have little feared the loss of her prize; but here she paused. Mrs. Carter looked at her evidently expecting something more. "Is that the whole?" she said. Alice would have given all she was worth to know the meaning of the

question; to understand how much Mrs. Carter knew. She did not say it was; but she muttered something unintelligible, which was understood to mean so.

"Thank you, Alice, for what you have told me," continued Mrs. Carter. "As far as it goes it agrees with what I had previously learnt. Now, Madeline, I trust that you will be equally candid."

Madeline's eyes were raised in mingled confusion and astonishment. "Candid! what could she be candid about?" She recollected; it must be the promise. Yes, there was nothing else, there could not be. In a very eager tone, without the smallest hesitation, she broke at once into the subject, "She did not know anything about reading wrong books; she had never heard of any one's doing so; but one day she found a book like that," pointing to the novel, "amongst Florence Trevelyan's, and she thought it was Mrs. Carter's; but Florence and Justine said they knew about it, and begged her not to tell; and Justine thought she had promised, but she had not; and she did not think much more about it, for she had never heard anything more after that one occasion."

"And Justine gave you a brooch, Madeline," said Mrs. Carter, sternly; "It was upon condition that you should not tell—it was a bribe."

Madeline's start of disgust spoke more plainly for her sincerity than any words. She turned to her companions, "Who had accused her? Who had spoken so falsely?"

Mrs. Carter checked her impetuosity. She said quietly, "It was Florence Trevelyan who told me you had received it. She mentioned it as a mark of your intimacy with Justine, and a sign that you were a participator in the secret."

Madeline gave a quick bright glance of conscious

innocence at Ruth, and with a voice which she vainly tried to keep subdued, answered, "Justine did give me a brooch. I did not know it was a bribe. I thought she was fond of me ; but I could not promise what she wished, and I gave it back. Ruth knows that I did, and Justine has it now ;" and Madeline looked earnestly at Mrs. Carter, watching the effect of her explanation.

Truth, it is said, is all-powerful. There was truth in every tone of Madeline's voice, in every gesture, even in the sparkle of her clear intelligent eye. Yet Mrs. Carter's brow relaxed but little of its severity. She turned again to Alice. "This sounds well," she said, "but there is something beyond ; I have not heard all from both of you. There was a subscription for the books ; Clara, Harriet, and Florence subscribed, and some one else. I have examined those concerned separately, and have received different accounts. Clara says it was Alice who gave the money. Justine states that she received it, but she did not exactly understand from whom it came. Florence tells me that the money was Madeline's. Madeline, bring me your account-book."

Madeline stood as if thunderstruck.

"Bring me your account-book," repeated Mrs. Carter.

Madeline, as she moved away, caught Ruth's eye, and read in it that she doubted her. Alas ! for that heart which has learnt to suspect evil in another, because it is conscious of it in itself.

When Madeline returned her eyes were filled with tears ; she laid the book before Mrs. Carter in silence. It was opened at the last page.

Mrs. Carter pointed to the figures, and said, "Madeline, the account is wrong by eighteenpence ; eighteenpence was the amount of the subscription to the library."

Madeline drew herself up proudly. "She did not know it; she had never heard that there was a subscription."

"Eighteenpence was the share paid either by you or by Alice," continued Mrs. Carter. "Let me advise you to think once more; have you no recollection, no idea, what has become of this money?"

"None whatever." Madeline's voice grew firmer.

Ruth leant forward and caught her hand. Her face was deadly pale, and in a faint whisper she said, "Madeline, dearest, pray tell."

"Madeline's hand was withdrawn impatiently. "Ruth, you are wrong," she exclaimed, "I have nothing to say. I would own to twenty times the fault if I had done it."

Ruth sank back in her chair, and put her hand to her forehead.

Mrs. Carter placed a smelling-bottle by her side, and said very affectionately, "My love, you may go if you wish it: this only distresses you; but we will hope Madeline is right."

Ruth did not take advantage of the permission.

Mrs. Carter sat for some instants deep in thought, whilst a low murmur passed round the circle. Suddenly she rose, and once more addressing them all, said, "There is in the house another volume of this book; if any one present has any knowledge where it is to be found, I request, I earnestly request, that I may be told."

No answer, only wandering looks of astonishment and ignorance.

"Alice," said Mrs. Carter, "do you know? Madeline, do you? Janet? Fanny?" Mrs. Carter was going round regularly.

A faint scream from Madeline stopped her. Ruth's head was drooping powerless; she was fainting. Mrs. Carter's natural kindness in an instant returned;

she supported Ruth, and bathed her forehead, and spoke fondly to her, and then, with the assistance of Miss Barnard, carried her up stairs, and laid her upon the sofa in the drawing-room. Miss Barnard remained to watch her, and Mrs. Carter returned to the dining-room. The short absence had been a time for busy conversation to all but Madeline and Alice. Madeline's fears for Ruth had absorbed all thoughts of her own situation; quiet tears stole down her cheeks, and every trace of excitement or anger had faded from her face. Alice sat like a statue; the voices around her, the persons, the circumstances in which she was placed, were as nothing to her; her thoughts were busy with memories of the past; before her mind's eye there floated a fair, gentle, shadowy image; a face of beauty, purity, holiness,—the face of her mother. And with her mother there came another remembrance, the thought of one whom she honoured, although she feared her; whose happiness in life was bound up in her good conduct. When Lady Catharine Hyde first became the friend of Mrs. Lennox, it was at school; the foundation of their affection was laid in the upright honesty of heart, which had induced Lady Catharine to acknowledge another's goodness, even though by so doing she condemned herself. Who would love Alice for the same cause?

Mrs. Carter returned. The expression of Alice's face was strangely altered; she pressed her lips together, and a bright pink spot burned upon her cheek. One foot was advanced as if she would have spoken, but Mrs. Carter gave no heed to her; her words were addressed to all equally. "I wish you to go to the school-room, and to remain there. Since this mystery cannot be cleared up in any other way, the house will be searched until the book is found."

A blank look of dismay fell upon all. No one

there present had cause to fear the search, but all felt bitterly the change in Mrs. Carter's manner. They turned away sorrowfully and silently. Mrs. Carter laid her hand upon Madeline's shoulder, and said, "Wait;" but before she could continue, Alice's voice interrupted her. Those who were leaving the room did not hear what was spoken; even Madeline did not, though she was standing very near; but Mrs. Carter bent her head and said,

"Certainly, directly if you will. Madeline, go with the rest. Let no one leave the school-room; my sister will join you there shortly."

Madeline followed her companions, and Alice was left with Mrs. Carter.

For a quarter of an hour Madeline sat alone,—bowed down with shame and grief, for an offence of which she yet knew herself to be innocent. She was sent for to the dining-room; another ten minutes passed. Then the door slowly opened, and Madeline and Alice came in together. Madeline's arm was thrown round Alice, and she whispered to her:—"Let me manage it; don't vex yourself." But Alice withdrew herself, and walking into the centre of the room, stood at the top of the long table. Madeline sat down to her desk as before. Alice's chain was twisted and untwisted; she coughed, looked round her, took up a book, sat down for a moment, got up again, and at last exclaimed: "Mrs. Carter knows about the subscription now; it is all right, and Maddy had nothing to do with it; and so you need not trouble yourselves, or ask any questions. Maddy was right; that's all;" and then poor Alice, her face of a burning crimson, and her eyes full of tears, rushed out of the room, and waited for several minutes in the passage to endeavour to recover her composure.

The true meaning of this speech was not to be

gained from Madeline. Her companions crowded around her, and questioned her, but Madeline only looked distressed, and said it did not concern any one but herself; only Alice was very good-natured, and she loved her dearly. She would be very much obliged if they would leave her alone and not make quite such a noise, because Ruth was lying down in the back drawing-room and it would disturb her.

But Madeline could keep nothing from Ruth, neither did Alice wish it. Now that the confession had been made to those whom it principally concerned, Alice was too much troubled to desire approbation which she did not deserve,—especially Ruth's. She could not, indeed, be at ease until certain that Ruth was made acquainted with her fault, and she would have been willing that Madeline should speak to her at once; but no one could venture to go up stairs, though Madeline longed to know whether Ruth was better.

"There will be no walking beyond the garden this evening," said Miss Barnard, as the clock struck five. "I am going there myself; I shall expect to see you all out in a quarter of an hour. Remember, no one goes up stairs."

Madeline ventured to ask if she might sit with Ruth. Miss Barnard was not sure; she would speak with Mrs. Carter first. Presently a message was sent by Dawson saying, that the Miss Cliffords might be together, but no one else was on any account to go even into the dressing-room. Dawson would fetch the bonnets and shawls.

Alice stopped Madeline as she was hastening out of the room. She tried to speak to her, but the words would not readily come; there were tears instead. "You are going to Ruth," she said, at length.

"Yes, but, Alice dear, never mind. Ruth will

understand, and she will thank you so much for being good-natured."

Alice shrunk from the thought of gratitude. "If she does not hate me, that is all I can expect. And she will want to tell Mary Vernon, and then some one else, and they will all know. Madeline, what will they think of me? I am so miserable, and I can't bear being with them all here; every thing is dull and changed. Shan't you be glad when it is found out who has the book?"

"I don't think any one has it," replied Madeline. "I don't think any one could hide it all this time. I believe it has fallen down somewhere, or is mislaid."

"Yes, perhaps so; but what will be done about Clara and Justine? How strange it is without them!"

"You miss Clara more than I do," said Madeline; "I did not like her ever."

"It is not missing exactly, but things are dull; and my heart is heavy, just as if a weight was upon it."

Madeline was upon the point of saying, "Go and talk to the others;" but that did not seem quite the advice to be given.

"They are all settling about the election," said Alice, looking at a party which had gathered round the window to dress for the garden. "I cannot imagine how they can think of it now; and Ruth ill too! It will be no good to have the election the day after to-morrow."

"You forget about Fanny Wilson's going away," said Madeline; "and perhaps Ruth will be better, and Mrs. Carter will have forgiven Clara by that time."

"Forgiven! no, that is not likely; I never saw her so much in earnest in being angry with any one. Oh! Maddy, if they would but be quiet! they make me wretched with the noise."

"Shall I ask them?" said Madeline.

"No, no, not for the world! they would want to

know what is the matter. You had better go—never mind me.”

“But I cannot leave you crying, dear Alice; shall I come into the garden with you?”

“No; go to Ruth: she ought to have you. I thought I should be happy when I had told; but I am not.”

Madeline grew very thoughtful for a few moments; then she said,—

“You know, Alice, what Mrs. Carter talked about?”

“Yes; the being wicked. I don’t forget it; I know it was very wicked.”

“And about saying prayers,” continued Madeline, with great hesitation.

“Yes; but I cannot do that till bed time; I wish I could.”

“We can say little prayers at any time,” said Madeline, and her colour heightened.

“No, not now, when they are all about.”

“Yes; just to ourselves; a few words we can,” said Madeline.

“Oh, no; I cannot; they will come and interrupt.”

“But if you take a book in your hand, and walk alone, they will not so much. You would like to be alone, Alice?”

“Alone, or with you. I should like to be with you best.”

“But, perhaps, it would be better if you could be quite alone,” persisted Madeline.

“Oh, no! that would not help me. I cannot say prayers out of my own head in that odd sort of way; I should think it wrong.”

“Papa told me one day,” replied Madeline, “that when I wanted to find out short prayers, I should look for them in the Psalms. If you were to take your prayer-book out, they would not say anything to

you, because they would fancy you were trying to get your psalm perfect for Sunday."

"But I don't know where to look for the verses," said Alice.

"Don't you? there are a great many all through the Psalms; and there are some especially which Mrs. Carter was talking to us about the other day; what she called the penitential Psalms. Don't you recollect? Little Ellen could not pronounce the word rightly."

"Yes, I remember," answered Alice: "but I could not say such words as those, you know, Maddy, because they would not be true for me. I am very sorry—very sorry indeed; but I don't think I am as sorry as those Psalms."

"The day papa talked to Ruth and me about the Psalms," continued Madeline, "he said that they were meant to show people what they ought to feel."

"But I don't feel," interrupted Alice.

"Papa said we could not use them all, only parts," continued Madeline; "but he thought when we had done anything very wrong, if we were to read some of them over—not all the penitential Psalms, but others too—they would make us think more how dreadful it was to do wrong; and then we might choose out the verses we could say, and make little prayers of them. He mentioned three particularly. Don't you think, Alice, if you were to tell them all that you want to read, and were to go away by yourself, you could just try?"

"I don't know; they would come and ask me what I was doing," replied Alice.

"But I should say, I wished to be quiet and read."

"Then they will come and peep, and call out loud that it is a prayer-book."

"Perhaps they will; I should not like that my-

self; but, Alice, it won't hurt you if they do, and I dare say they will let you alone if you really ask them. I think I should begin."

"Begin what?" asked Alice.

"Those three papa named. I will give you the list,—the 25th, and the 130th, and the 143rd."

"And read them through?" said Alice.

"Yes, all through; and afterwards pick out the verses, and just say them over again like prayers. Perhaps, Alice, you would not have such a heavy heart then."

Alice gave a deep sigh.

"I think I should like it," she said. "I should like to do something grave; I cannot laugh now. But how shall I manage if they make fun of me?"

"Tell them you are reading because you like it, and walk up and down, and don't talk to them, and then, perhaps, they will leave off. But, Alice, you need not be so much afraid now, because Clara is not here, and Miss Barnard will be in the garden."

"Miss Barnard! I forgot!" exclaimed Alice. "She will scold if we are not out. Maddy, give me your prayer-book and the list."

"It is written on the first leaf," replied Madeline. "I marked the psalms down in pencil the very day papa talked about them."

Alice seized the prayer-book, hid it under a lesson-book, and carried both with her into the garden; and before Madeline went upstairs to her sister, she watched her from the window pacing the side walk alone. Madeline called to Janet Harding, who was passing at the moment, and said,—

"I have a favour to ask of you, Janet. Will you try and not let Alice be teased? She says she wants to read by herself, and she is afraid you will all interrupt her; but you will keep the rest away if you can, won't you?"

Janet promised willingly ; she was always ready to please Madeline.

"But you won't say anything about it, or tell them that I have spoken to you," continued Madeline.

Janet again promised, though she looked at Alice with some surprise and curiosity. Madeline nodded to Alice as she caught her eye when she came along the walk, and then, secure in having provided one champion at least for Alice in case of annoyance, ran upstairs to Ruth.

For a whole hour Madeline and Ruth were together in the drawing-room, Ruth lying on the sofa, Madeline sitting on a little stool by her side. Ruth said she was not better, and she did not look better. Her complexion was still pale, though her cheek was flushed, and there were dark shadows under the eyes. Madeline thought her ill ; but there was something strange in the illness ; something which had altered Ruth very much. Ruth was rather subject to headache, especially when she was anxious or excited. This seemed like a common headache, at least Ruth did not complain more than usual. Still she was different ; or was it that everything was different ? that the mystery in the house made even Ruth mysterious ? It might be so ; but from whatever cause, Madeline felt a restraint with her sister during that hour's conversation, which was new and painful to her.

They talked almost entirely upon one subject ; that is, Madeline talked ; Ruth only said, "Yes," and "No," and sometimes turned away with a look of weariness. Madeline was full of the events of the morning, and the conduct of Alice. "I love Alice now," she said, "more, a great deal more than ever. I dare say she did not mean any harm about the money ; she would have repaid it in the holidays."

"Yes, perhaps so," and Ruth said no more.

"Dear Ruth! I am tiring you; but I want so much to know what you think about it: whether you don't call Alice very good-natured for not letting me be blamed; and whether you are not sure that Lady Catharine would be very pleased if she knew it."

"I don't know, perhaps so, she might."

"Might, Ruth! but I am certain of it. You know if she had not spoken, I should have been in a dreadful scrape. Mrs. Carter said she was afraid for me; and she was so kind to Alice afterwards, and forgave her quite, and told her what to do to take care another time; only she said one dreadful thing; that letting another person be accused unjustly and being silent, was really bearing false witness against our neighbour; and she said that was what Alice had done, and then she spoke so very seriously. But I cannot understand that Alice really was as bad as that; being silent does not seem like speaking; only Mrs. Carter declares it is. What do you think?" No answer. "And, Ruth," added Madeline, "what will Mary Vernon say when she comes back?"

Yes, what would Mary Vernon say? Ruth had many times in the day thought of that; Mary Vernon was to return late that evening. How much she would have to hear!

"Have they searched all the house?" Ruth managed to say in one of Madeline's pauses, speaking in a faint voice.

"I don't know, but I think Dawson was going into the school-room. I am sure the book must have slipped down. No one would let such a fuss be made who knew where it was." Ruth lay motionless—even her breathing seemed for the instant stopped; she turned her head from side to side as if in great pain.

"Janet Harding thinks that Clara will be sent

away," continued Madeline. "She says that a sister of hers, one of Janet's sisters, I mean, was at a school where something of the kind happened, and one of the girls was sent away directly. Clara is alone in Mrs. Carter's dressing-room, and Harriet and Florence are in her bed-room; and I don't know where Justine is. Jessie thinks that Dawson was told to carry up some dinner to her, but I think she must be gone home. Oh dear! how I wish the book was found."

"Madeline," said Ruth, "some one is calling you."

Madeline listened, "I cannot hear any one; but there is talking;—hark! yes, Mrs. Carter is asking for me," and Madeline instantly ran down stairs.

Ruth trembled like an aspen leaf. That summons might denote a discovery. Then, there was no further prospect of delay. Confession or sin lay before her. But had she not sinned already? was it nothing to have disregarded her mother's wishes; to have concealed her fault; to have determined upon allowing others to go on in an evil course, unchecked; to have caused pain and suspicion to Mrs. Carter; and annoyance, to speak in the lightest terms, to a whole household? Was it nothing to have acted a lie; to have pretended ignorance by silence, though she would not have dared to say it in words? All these things had Ruth done; to this extent had she sinned, and because of these sins, because she could not humble herself to own them, she now stood upon the brink of one sin more.

Madeline spoke to Mrs. Carter, and went into the school-room. Ruth heard nothing more for several minutes. A door opened, she caught a sound of sobs! It closed again. Ruth rose and walked to the head of the stairs. The voices she heard were in Mrs. Carter's study. In the school-room there

seemed a general lull. Presently Dawson came up the stairs—she passed quickly, so that there was no time to ask what was going on, even if Ruth had found courage to do so. It seemed better to go back to the drawing-room, yet Ruth still stood near the door, which was ajar. Footsteps came slowly down the stair-case. Harriet Trevelyan was first, then Florence, Clara, and Justine Le Vergnier. Ruth had one glimpse of their features as they went by, and could see the change in all. Even Clara Manners for once seemed subdued. “Dawson,” said Ruth, catching hold of the servant’s dress as she approached her, “wait one minute, I want to know. Have they—have they found the book?”

“Why! Miss Clifford, how you frightened me! I did not know any one was there. Yes, it is found.”

“Where?” was upon Ruth’s lips, but she could not bring herself to put the question.

Dawson looked at her with compassion. “Your head must be very bad, Miss Clifford; you look so deadly pale: can’t I fetch you something?”

“No, thank you, Dawson; I am better. What does Mrs. Carter want with them all?”

“Indeed, Miss Clifford, I can’t tell much about it. The book was found in Miss Harding’s bottom drawer, where she keeps her cloaks. We missed it once, and my Mistress made us go through the drawers again. But I must not stop; are you sure I can’t get anything for you?”

One thing there was which Ruth wanted;—one thing—but no earthly power could give it her. It was a humble spirit. She turned away from Dawson, and went back to the sofa to cry bitterly and think.

This was Ruth’s last moment for repentance and action. She felt that it was so, and her heart was softened. A sudden impulse of wretchedness induced

her once more to go to the head of the stairs ; but the action was not the result of firm resolution ; it was an effort made without prayer, trusting in her own strength, and it failed. The parlour door opened for an instant, and Ruth, in an agony of causeless alarm, rushed back to her former position, to await whatever might occur.

The weariness, the bitterness, the sad sinking of the heart, the shame of that next hour may not well be described. There are those who have felt it, who have sunk under a similar temptation, and suffered a like trial. For them there needs no description. There are others who as yet are ignorant of it. May God grant them such a portion of His grace, such an assistance from the Spirit of Truth and Holiness, that they may never learn its misery by experience !

When an hour had gone by Madeline re-appeared, and with her came Mrs. Carter. The brightness of the afternoon had passed away ; a shadow seemed stealing over all things ; the room looked cheerless ; the sounds of bustle and amusement which usually filled the house had ceased. Mrs. Carter's steady tread, her anxious restrained expression of countenance, Madeline's first eager glance, and immediately afterwards her downcast look, and the tears which stood in her eyes, frightened Ruth. Mrs. Carter walked up to the sofa, and sat down by Ruth, without speaking. Madeline stood.

"Sit down, my dear," said Mrs. Carter, in a tone which few would have discovered to be full of agitation. She took Ruth's cold hand and felt her pulse ; it was rapid and weak, and Mrs. Carter stooped to kiss her forehead and pity her. Then she said : "Ruth, we are in sad perplexity ; have you heard ?"

"No one has been here since Madeline went away," replied Ruth, evading the answer.

"We have found the missing book," continued Mrs. Carter. "Where, you will scarcely imagine: in Janet's drawer."

Ruth's heart throbbed till she was faint, yet she summoned strength to ask: "Who found it?"

"Dawson found it," replied Mrs. Carter. "She had searched the drawer before, but overlooked it."

Mrs. Carter paused, and Ruth's eyes closed for an instant, for she dared not look upon the friend she was deceiving.

"Still, I am not satisfied," continued Mrs. Carter; "Janet denies all knowledge of the book; she could not tell even its title; her look and manner were those of perfect innocence; I can scarcely distrust her. Yet who else could have put it there?"

"Dawson says it might have come there by accident," Madeline ventured to observe; "she does not think Janet would tell a story."

"Neither do I, Madeline," replied Mrs. Carter; "at least, I am very unwilling to believe it. Janet has many faults, but I do not think she is insincere. It is possible that the book may have been placed there accidentally with the cloak. I need not ask, Ruth, if you can help me to find out the truth. I am certain you would if you could."

Ruth's answer was scarcely heard.

Mrs. Carter looked very anxious, but there was no suspicion in her face; she bent fondly over Ruth, smoothing her forehead, and remarking to Madeline, "that it would not do to tease her with questions till she was better."

Ruth could not smile, she could not even feel grateful, but she roused herself and said, "She was sure that Janet must be innocent." A long sigh followed, and Ruth turned away her face that the shame of her heart might not be read in it.

Mrs. Carter sat for some minutes in thought.

Presently, she turned to Ruth and again felt her pulse. The cold hand was now burning. "We must have advice for you to-morrow, my child, if you are not better."

Ruth endeavoured to force a smile. She said that she hoped to be quite well to-morrow.

"It is the excitement," continued Mrs. Carter; "every one has been excited to-day. Poor Janet! I never should have suspected her."

"Janet always spoke truth to us," said Madeline. "Did she not, Ruth?"

Ruth bent her head instead of replying.

"We shall see," replied Mrs. Carter. "I am not decided that she is guilty. I cannot feel to her as I do to the others concerned in this sad business. My dear children, I am only thankful the disappointment has not been in you." Mrs. Carter once more kissed them both and left them together.

Ruth watched till the door closed behind Mrs. Carter, and then she seized Madeline's hand, and exclaimed: "Janet will not be punished."

Madeline looked at her in astonishment. "She will not be punished unless something more is proved. No one thinks she has any thing to do with it."

"What can they think then?" asked Ruth, whilst her voice grew husky.

"They think it was an accident; some of the drawers were cleared out the other day, and the cloaks carried into the closet in the back room, where Clara says she always kept the books; and Mrs. Carter supposes it may have been taken up by accident when they were replaced. Dawson says so too."

"And what makes them so sure about Janet?"

"Her manner a great deal. She did not blush, nor cry, but she looked so very surprised; and Clara and they all protested they had never mentioned the matter to her; and no one had ever seen her look at

any strange books down stairs ; she was always sitting in the school-room at her desk ; and at night we must have known it, because we were in the same room. I am sure she had nothing to do with it."

Ruth heaved a sigh of relief, yet a sharp pang of conscience accompanied it.

"One reason why I am sure of Janet," continued Madeline, "is, that she is so strict about religion and those things. Clara used to say she was a hypocrite, but I never thought her so ; and Alice thinks she is in earnest, though it makes her angry to hear her quote texts."

"Her papa and mamma seem very particular," said Ruth, forcing herself to make some remark.

"Yes, and very odd ; and I should not like them much," continued Madeline ; "but still they are good, and Janet is more careful about her prayers and the Bible than almost any one ; that is why I never laugh at her. You don't think she took the book, do you, Ruth?"

Ruth started up without answering.

"Where are you going? What is the matter?" asked Madeline, half alarmed

Ruth stopped, and returned to the sofa. "My head aches very much," she said.

"And you want to go bed? I will ask if you may."

"Stay one instant," said Ruth ; "where are Clara and Justine?"

"Justine is gone. Mrs. Carter sent her with Dawson, and wrote a note to Monsieur Le Vergnier. She is never to be here again ; never, Mrs. Carter said, twice."

"And Clara?" asked Ruth.

"She is to sleep alone in Mary Vernon's room to-night. Mrs. Carter said something worse of her than of any one. I think she means that her papa shall

be sent for, to take her away in disgrace, but I did not quite understand. Mrs. Carter was quite kind in comparison to Florence and Harriet; that is, she was very grave and vexed; but she did not say she should punish them much, and they do seem very sorry. I don't think they will ever go on so badly again."

"Mrs. Carter is very kind," said Ruth, in a low, musing tone.

"Oh, yes! so exceedingly kind; so wishing that it should all be happy and right again. If it were only quite settled about Janet, I think it would be."

"Janet!" repeated Ruth, as if speaking to herself.

"Should you like to see her?" asked Madeline.

Ruth shrank as if a serpent had stung her.

"No, no; I can't—I don't wish it. Madeline, pray don't," and more calmly Ruth added, "Mrs. Carter is busy now."

"Rather; but I will ask about your going to bed, and perhaps she will come and wish you good night."

"I don't want it—my head—if I can only go to bed," said Ruth.

"Well, you shall, dear. Mrs. Carter will be sure to say yes."

Madeline's light, little step scarcely sounded as she ran down stairs. Ruth heard her cheerful voice when she spoke to some one whom she met at the bottom. She heard her say,—

"Janet, dear, don't fret. Mrs. Carter tries to believe you, and I do quite. We shall find out by-and-by."

Janet's melancholy tone was all that caught Ruth's ear, until a few sentences more had passed between them, but Janet's last words were,—

"Give my love to Ruth, and tell her I am very sorry her head is so bad."

CHAPTER II.

The greater number of persons, whether old or young, think but little of their own faults or of the faults of others. They do not see the ends to which their actions are tending; they imagine it certain that all must be right at last, and so they hear of evil and speak of it, perhaps sigh over it, or condemn it, and then go away to their occupations and their pleasures, and forget it. But there are some events which must make an impression upon the minds even of the youngest and most thoughtless. The departure of Clara Manners was of this description; it was full of mystery. No one of Mrs. Carter's pupils saw her after she was sent back to her room, when the book was discovered in Janet Harding's drawer. No one knew exactly what was to become of her. Some thought that she was to be sent home directly; others that she was to wait till they all went. Madeline stated her belief that it was Mrs. Carter's intention to have her first taken to the house of her aunt, a lady who lived very near London. The conjectures were made early the following morning; they were set at rest before the close of the day.

Mrs. Carter was absent from the school-room during the early lessons, and hurried away from the dinner table, as a carriage drove into the sweep, even before a visitor was announced. Miss Barnard's orders were very strict that no one was to leave the room, and they sat there silent and listening. Conversation went on in the drawing-room above them for some little time; there was an opening and shut-

ting of doors, and a heavy tread on the stairs, as if two persons were carrying down a trunk. At last the drawing-room door was heard to open, and the voices became more distinct. Mrs. Carter spoke and a stranger answered. It was impossible to hear what was said then, but Mrs. Carter's words were clearer as they approached the drawing-room door. She addressed Clara by name, and bade her good-b'ye; but the tone—how different it was from the expression of fond maternal kindness which usually called them all "dear children!" Whether Clara's proud feelings were touched none could tell; but she must have hurried in shame to the carriage, for it seemed but an instant before its wheels rolled over the sweep, and, like a prisoner carried away to punishment, she was taken from them never to return. Mrs. Carter came back to the parlour with a very grave countenance. It was with real difficulty that she said to them, "Clara Manners is gone. Her aunt has taken charge of her for the present. She sent a message of remembrance to you all." Mrs. Carter paused as if desirous to discover the effect of her intelligence. No one ventured to reply or thank her. Ruth, who at other times was the first to speak, dropped her handkerchief on the floor and stooped for it. Her face was not clearly seen until Mrs. Carter said,—

"You may go to the school-room; all, except Harriet, Florence, and Janet."

Ruth went with her companions to the school-room, and busied herself with her books. The struggle that was passing in her mind was terrible. It was more than she could bear, and her resolution was taken. Should Janet be punished she would instantly confess. Alas! even then Ruth's decision was not that of true repentance; it was not the result of self-examination and humility; it was but the sudden impulse of a goading conscience, and

when Mrs. Carter came back and announced to the whole school that Harriet and Florence were forgiven, and that Janet's assertion was accepted, from the doubt whether the book had not been mislaid by accident, and in the absence of more positive proof against her, Ruth sank back to her former state of mind, and said to herself that confession was un-called-for; the fault that she had committed was trifling; it would never be repeated; Janet was not now injured by her silence; and confession would only lower her influence in the school, vex Mrs. Carter, and distress her parents. Her future conduct should entirely make amends for any error of which she had been guilty.

Poor Ruth! she was storing up bitter hours for herself. She did not remember what she had so often been taught, that no goodness of her own, even could the remainder of her life be perfect, could atone for the smallest sin in the sight of God. Forgiven indeed all may be, even the worst of sinners, for the sake of the Saviour, who bore the punishment of all sin; but before we can obtain this forgiveness there must be the humble acknowledgment of guilt, both to God and our fellow man, if our offence has been against both; that acknowledgment from which Ruth in the pride of her heart still strove to escape.

And this was the state of affairs on the morning of the 15th of June; the holiday, the election day—the day which Ruth had once thought of as far off, yet earnestly to be desired; the day which now she dreaded, so as she had never dreaded any other day of her life. It was strange to see how soon all things had in a great measure returned to their former state. Clara's name was not mentioned, even Justine Le Vergnier was not openly regretted. It seemed as if disagreeable recollections were by common consent to be banished and if any secretly

sighed for Clara's high spirits, or Justine's amusing anecdotes, they did not choose to do more than express a passing regret. The adorning of the room and the preparations for the day's ceremony had taken the place of every other idea.

"Mary Vernon! Where is Mary? we must have her," was the general cry in the school-room after breakfast. Mary had returned late on the previous evening; even Ruth had not seen her then.

"Mary is hearing the history from Mrs. Carter," said Fanny Wilson. "I know Mrs. Carter sent for her to the study."

An uncomfortable pause followed. Florence and Harriet began talking about some coloured paper flowers with which the chair of the judge was to be decorated; and Alice whispered to Madeline, that Mary would not speak to her now, she was sure.

"Oh! Alice, how can you think so?" exclaimed Madeline. "Mary never was hard to any one in all her life; and beside Mrs. Carter is not going to mention any thing about you. She said she would not."

"I wish I could be sure," said Alice.

"I am quite, and I will ask Ruth."

Ruth was sitting in a comfortable chair by the window: it was open; the fresh air blew pleasantly upon her face, the birds sang sweetly in her ear, her pale face had a tinge of colour upon it; she smiled when her sister came near, and Madeline thought that she was happy. Alice stood at a little distance and watched her. Before Madeline had finished what she had to say, Jessie O'Neile ran up and interrupted her. A friend of her mamma's, who lived near, had just sent her some early strawberries; Jessie did not care about herself, she only thought of her dear Ruth, and now she pressed her to eat them all, for she had brought them on purpose. Ruth accepted the present gratefully, and Jessie stood by delighted,

for a short time, and presently went away to fetch a footstool. Two more of the party came back with Jessie. They had been preparing evergreens and flowers, and had made up a pretty little nosegay which they thought Ruth would like; and they wished to consult her about a crown which they had an idea of making for the judge. These drew others to the same spot, and one by one nearly all collected round Ruth at the open window, interested about her, consulting her, making her the first person. Still Alice stood alone, and looked on. "Delightful! here is Mary Vernon," she heard Madeline exclaim, and as Mary came in, a way was opened for her and a seat provided for her by Ruth's side; and Alice thought that the kiss and inquiry which followed would never have been bestowed upon her. Mary had scarcely had time to speak to Ruth before; but since breakfast she had received an account of all that had transpired from Mrs. Carter, and with it of Ruth's indisposition; and both Mrs. Carter and Mary imagined it possible that the headache of which Ruth still complained might be increased, if not caused by the painful excitement into which the school had been thrown.

"Should you like to be Ruth, Alice?" said a quiet melancholy voice, close at Alice's side.

"Janet! you quite startled me, I thought you were in the next room."

"Why don't you help, Alice?" continued Janet.

"They can do without me," replied Alice, "now Mary is come."

"But I thought you cared so much, and were taking such pains. What makes you give it up?"

"Because I am not wanted; that is all."

"They don't seem to think of any one but Ruth," said Janet.

"No, but Ruth deserves it."

There was a heavy, weary sigh from Janet. "Mamma did not know what school was when she sent me here," she said; "it makes me a great deal worse than I was before."

"Worse, repeated Alice, what do you mean?"

"I hate it all" replied Janet; "so would you if you were like me."

"I cannot understand, Janet; you are so very odd, what is the matter?"

"Ruth is very happy," continued Janet; "every one loves her and praises her."

"They praise her because she is good," replied Alice; "I should like to be good too."

"But I am not sure mamma would think Ruth good," pursued Janet; "yet they all put her up, and put me down."

"Oh! Janet, how silly; no one thinks of putting you down."

"Mrs. Carter does," said Janet; "she never suspected Ruth, and she did me."

"The drawer was yours; that was the reason; Mrs. Carter has quite forgotten it all."

"Has she? No, Alice, she does not forget; none of them do. They will never make me judge if I live here for ever."

"Then you are envious!" exclaimed Alice; "and of Ruth!"

"I do not think I am envious; but I would rather be Ruth than any person in all the world."

"Rather than Mary Vernon?"

"Yes, because she has no mother, and no sister, and Ruth has every thing. Look at them all now, and the fruit, and the flowers. And this afternoon she will be judge, and first of all."

"I do not care about those things," said Alice; "I would rather Ruth should have them."

"I never knew I cared till I came to school," said

Janet; but school makes me wicked. And you are like the rest, Alice; you all look down upon me."

"If you mean about the book, Janet," exclaimed Alice, with some degree of impatience, "you are quite mistaken. I do not believe you had any thing to do with it."

"Really! upon your honour?" asked Janet.

"Yes, really, upon my honour; what makes you doubt?"

"I cannot help doubting, answered Janet," I am so unhappy; and now they are all cheerful again it is worse. If I could only be Ruth! she has every thing."

Alice was sorry for Janet, but there was something in her tone and manner which irritated her; a whining fretfulness, with which it was difficult to sympathise. Her old dislike revived strongly, and she went away hastily, leaving Janet more convinced by her manner that she was still suspected, than she was satisfied by her words. Mary Vernon having finished what she had to say to Ruth, was looking round for some one else. Her eye caught Janet's, and she smiled, but Janet did not smile in return. Mary looked at Ruth as if asking for an explanation, and breaking away from those who were pressing round, seeking her advice and assistance, she went to speak to Janet. Alice was in her way as she passed, and there was a cordial shake of the hand, which, with a few kind words, made Alice return to her companions happier. If Mary knew how wrong she had been, it was evident that she did not despise her.

"Ruth, dear, do help us about this wreath," said Fanny Wilson: "it is to go round the mirror at the bottom of the room." Ruth took no notice, and Madeline touched her to make her attend. Ruth started and shuddered; but she recovered herself

and gave her opinion. Then again, her eye rested upon Mary and Janet, as if drawn by some power which could not be resisted.

"Janet thinks she is suspected, still," said Alice, watching Ruth's glance; "I hope Mary will put the idea out of her head. It makes her more tiresome than ever."

"You should not call her tiresome," said Madeline; "should she Ruth? We should be just the same if we had been suspected, I dare say; at least, I should."

A conversation followed about suspicion—the painfulness of unjust suspicion—being the cause of it; during which Ruth pulled to pieces the evergreens which lay near her, and once or twice made some indifferent remark, and at length confessed to Madeline that her head was beginning to ache more, and she should like to go into the garden.

Mary Vernon's conversation with Janet was a long one, and as it went on, Ruth walked up and down the terrace with Madeline in a state of great nervous anxiety. But though Mary and Janet spoke much of Ruth, it was not with any allusion to the lost book. Janet was soon satisfied, as satisfied as with her peevish disposition she ever could be, that Mary Vernon was quite willing to believe her word. She owned that she was pleased; contented, she said, with Mary's confidence; but the sad, low, drawling tone was not very like contentment; and when Mary proposed to her to go to the others and assist in ornamenting the room, Janet declined.

"Why?" inquired Mary. "If you are sure they are as fond of you as before, why should you keep aloof?"

"They are not fond of me," replied Janet; "they care only for Ruth; she is first with every one."

"But, Janet dear, you must not be so envious."



"I do not want to do any harm to Ruth," said Janet; "I only wish I could be in her place."

"You don't care for the fruit and the flowers, I am sure," said Mary, laughing.

"No, not for anything in particular; but all: she is so much better off than I am, and I don't see why she should be."

Mary looked pained, and after a little delay, said gently, "Indeed, Janet, that feeling is wrong. I think your mamma must have taught you that it is; for you say she was always talking to you about the Bible, and your duty."

Janet regarded Mary as she said this, with more interest, and a sense of sympathy. "I wonder whether you think about the Bible as much as mamma does," she said. "I fancied just now, that there was no one here who thought about it, they all seemed so wicked; and whenever I say any thing out of the Bible they laugh or turn away, even Madeline does:—that shows they dislike it."

"Not quite," replied Mary with a smile; "only they do not like your repeating it."

"It is just the same; it is because they are not good."

"Perhaps even if we were good, we should not always like it," answered Mary; because it does not always suit what we are doing. The Bible words are sacred, and when we mix them up with common words, even if there is no harm in the common words, they do not seem fitting. I know many good people who can scarcely bring themselves to name the Name of God, or our Blessed Saviour in general conversation, because they feel so much reverence."

"That is not at all what I have been accustomed to," replied Janet; "and a great many laugh."

"Not those who are serious-minded. The care-

less ones laugh, as they would at everything connected with religion ; the others are silent, I know, I have watched them often. But Janet, will you let me say one thing to you. Don't you think it is better whilst we are young, and when we have no right to put ourselves forward, to think more about doing right, setting a good example, than talking, even if we are quite in earnest? It seems to me that it is safer."

"I don't know what you mean by safer," said Janet.

"Less likely to make us conceited and criticising ; because when our whole hearts are set upon doing our duty, we see so much evil in ourselves, that we learn to judge charitably of others."

"I am much more wicked since I came to school," observed Janet, in a musing tone.

"And what has made you so?" asked Mary.

Janet's reply was quick and earnest.

"The things I see make me so. They none of them care for all that I have cared for, and they dislike me and ridicule me, and they think only of Ruth ; she has everything she wishes. I would exchange with her this instant."

"Hush ! Janet ! pray take care. Such a thought cannot be right. We are told not to desire anything which is our neighbour's."

"Not houses, and sheep, and cows, and those things," replied Janet.

"Anything," again repeated Mary ; "we are not to desire anything, not any change at all, except that of becoming better. And, Janet, sometimes we know that persons' ignorant wishes have been heard, and they have been miserable."

"I should not be miserable if I were Ruth," replied Janet.

"Indeed—indeed you do not know what you are

saying, Janet. You cannot tell what you are wishing."

Ruth came in from the garden at this instant; she looked tired, and Mary's glance was an anxious one.

"Ruth is not well," she remarked, turning again to Janet.

"She will be better soon; I should not care for that," replied Janet.

"And she looks grave—sad quite," continued Mary.

"She has no cause for it," said Janet.

"She may have things to make her unhappy which we do not know of," added Mary.

"She cannot have as much as I have. Still I would be her."

Mary said no more. She was called away abruptly, and the conversation ended; but before the close of that day Janet had received a lasting warning against the folly of her blind and discontented wishes.

As the morning hour wore on, the two rooms gradually assumed a different aspect. The doors between them were kept open; the desks and tables were placed against the wall, so as to be entirely out of the way; all the stray books were put into the closet, and the benches, chairs, and stools were ranged in rows at the bottom of the outer room. Near the centre doorway was a round table, ornamented with two jars of flowers, and holding in the middle a china vase, into which the papers containing the votes were to be dropped. Two arm chairs were provided for Mrs. Carter and Miss Barnard on each side of the table, and at the top of the inner room was a high seat, or, as it was called, a throne, decked with evergreens and flowers, and placed under a canopy prettily contrived by the aid of some bright-coloured shawls and bouquets of flowers. There were evergreens also about

the room, flowers on the mantelpiece, a wreath made especially for Mrs. Carter's picture, which hung over it, and, before the preparations were quite ended, room was found on one of the side tables for some wine, and cake, and fruit, sent by Mrs. Carter's desire, that they might in due form wish health and prosperity to the new judge.

"Ruth, we must just ornament the fruit and cake dishes, and then we shall be quite ready. Does it not look nice?" said Alice, coming up to her.

Ruth smiled a faint, sickly smile.

"And all for you," continued Alice, not noticing her manner; "it is quite certain. You must be well and enjoy it. How is your head now?"

"Better," Ruth said shortly, but the answer was not honest.

"Hark! there is the dinner bell. Is everything ready?" exclaimed Madeline.

"Everything except the flowers round the dishes."

Alice, Madeline, and Fanny Wilson promised to come in directly dinner was over and arrange them.

"I don't want any dinner," said Ruth, in an under tone, to her sister. "I would much rather stay here."

"Oh! Ruth, are you so very unwell? Perhaps we had better not have all the fuss. What shall we do?"—Madeline turned to Mary Vernon before Ruth could interpose to prevent her.—"Ruth is ill, Mary; she cannot go in to dinner."

Mary appeared vexed and uneasy.

"Dear Ruth, why did you not say so before? The noise has been too much for you."

"No, not ill—not ill at all," answered Ruth, and she stood up and walked into the dining-room.

Mary did not offer to go with her. Some painful idea seemed to have struck her, and she lingered till the last. Her place was filled up; the absence of a

few days had made it seem natural to be without her, and when some one offered to move, Mary declined, and took her seat at the corner end of the table on the opposite side to Ruth.

"My dear Mary, you have as bad an appetite as Ruth," said Mrs. Carter. "I must have a physician for you both."

Mary smiled, and began to eat, but from time to time her eyes were raised stealthily to Ruth, as if she would not be seen watching, and yet desired to know all that Ruth was doing. It was a short dinner, and when the cloth was removed, Alice, Fanny, and Madeline returned to the school-room; the others were to remain where they were until summoned to the election of the judge. Mrs. Carter and Miss Barnard went away also. Janet Harding looked wistfully after Alice, who was the last to leave the parlour.

"Would you like to go to the school-room, Janet?" said Mary, who was standing by Ruth's chair.

"I should like it, if they would have me," answered Janet.

"They would like it, would they not, Ruth? You can answer for Madeline."

Ruth assented, but so feebly, that Janet was annoyed.

"I did not mean to interfere," she said. "I know quite well that Ruth is first, and is to have all things her own way."

Ruth turned uneasily in her chair.

"Say something that may soothe her, if you can," whispered Mary.

Ruth's lips moved, but that was all.

"You would be glad for her to help, if it would please her?" pursued Mary.

"No, Mary," interrupted Janet, proudly; "Ruth does not want me to do anything for her; she has a spite against me, like the others."

"Oh! nonsense, Janet. Do tell her, Ruth, how foolish it is to have such fancies."

"Very foolish," repeated Ruth mechanically.

"But it is no nonsense," replied Janet. "Ruth never troubles herself about me; and she did not say a single word yesterday, and she has not to-day, about the book."

"That must have been because she was not well, and did not think it necessary," said Mary. "When you declared you knew nothing of it, she believed you at once. Was not that it, Ruth?"

Ruth's hand trembled violently, as it rested on the arm of a sofa near. She drew the other over her face, but it did not serve her purpose of concealment. Mary saw that she was very much agitated.

"What can be the matter? Speak to me, Ruth; just tell me," she said.

Janet drew nearer, half in curiosity, half in alarm.

Ruth motioned her back, and, in a broken voice, whispered,—

"Mary, in pity keep her away; I cannot bear it."

"She is not well, Janet; she will be better presently; just ask Miss Barnard for her salts."

"No, no; I am well—quite well. Pray don't go."

Ruth looked up, her face pale as ashes, her lips quivering. Mary took her hand.

"Ruth, you frighten me," she said.

Ruth's eyes were still fixed upon Janet.

"If she would go away—if she would not stare at me! Do make her go."

"Mary quietly begged that Janet would leave them to themselves; the fewer that were about Ruth the better, and Janet moved slowly away."

"Is she gone?" said Ruth, raising her head.

"Yes, gone to the others. Are you better now? What makes you feel so ill?"

"Ill!—no, I don't feel ill—not exactly—I can't

tell—Mary what shall I do?" and Ruth leant her head upon Mary's shoulder and gasped for breath.

"You must let me speak to Mrs. Carter; I must stop the noise and bustle, dearest Ruth," said Mary, much frightened; "you are not equal to it."

Ruth caught her hand and held it very tight. "Mary, you will not—I could not bear it. It must all be, now," she added, in a low voice.

"What must be Ruth? Are you really ill?" Mary's voice was earnest, full of deep anxiety. She looked steadfastly at Ruth, and their eyes met; and then Ruth took away her hand, exclaiming, "I am quite well, indeed, Mary. I can bear it all. They are ready, see."

"Prepared! all prepared!" exclaimed Fanny Wilson, rushing into the room. Madeline came up to Ruth. "We have such a comfortable seat for you, the old seat by the window, and we have put a cushion and a footstool. Dear Ruth, is your poor head better?"

"Leave her with me one minute, Madeline," said Mary Vernon, gravely. "Ruth," she continued, as Madeline went aside; "I do not think I am right in letting you go through all this excitement, and I cannot understand you. Is there anything you are keeping from me?"

Ruth shook like an aspen leaf, but made no reply.

"Come! you must come! Mrs. Carter is there, it is all ready," cried Fanny. "Mary and Ruth, what are you doing?"

The room was nearly empty, for the greater number hurried away at the first summons. Madeline had been sent for by Alice. Janet Harding remained. Ruth's eye rested upon her with an expression of intense pain.

"Mrs. Carter is quite ready," again called out some one coming to the door.

"Ruth, have you a secret? are you ill? Why will you make me so unhappy?" said Mary.

Ruth was standing up; she sat down again, and buried her face in her hands.

"Is Mary Vernon here?" inquired Miss Barnard, entering the room.

Mary glanced at Ruth imploringly, but her manner was in an instant changed; all her self-command seemed restored, and rising once more, she led the way into the school-room. The sight which presented itself was unusually gay and pretty. The benches were filled; and Mrs. Carter and Miss Barnard were seated by the round table, the brilliant colours of the canopy were arranged with great taste, and amongst the dark evergreens, shone many of the earliest and most delicate summer flowers, now touched by the glancing, flickering rays of the afternoon sun. All seemed glad, pure, and bright. Ruth's head was erect, her step was firm as she entered the room. If there was an uneasiness in the glance of her eyes, and something forced in her manner, the signs were too trifling to be generally remarked. But Mary's face caught the attention of several. A whisper went round, it met Ruth's ear. It was said that Mary was sad, that she was thinking of Clara and Justine. Madeline remarked to Ruth, that it appeared wrong entirely to forget them, and Ruth pretended not to hear and remained silent.

Mrs. Carter looked round to see if all were assembled. Then she stood up and spoke to them, kindly and earnestly. She said that it might seem at first sight, a mere matter of amusement for which they were collected together; and that she would have left them entirely to themselves, if it had not been their own wish that she should be present; but it was a great satisfaction to her—they could little tell how great—to join with them,

to be one with them in their interests and pleasures. And in this instance, she could not help feeling that the object for which they had met was beyond amusement. To her, it was one of great importance; perhaps, some of them would agree with her; all probably would who could trace the improvement which had taken place in the school during the last two years. When Mary Vernon was first appointed judge, there was prevalent amongst them, besides a frequent neglect of orders, a tone of carelessness about serious things and sometimes even of irreverence. It was often the cause of great regret and anxiety both to her sister and herself. However they might strive to enforce right principles whilst with their pupils, there were times when necessarily they were left alone, and at those times great mischief was done. "Such mischief," continued Mrs. Carter, "still no doubt exists; painful experience has shown us all that it does so; but how much it has been lessened by Mary's constant watchfulness, I could not have imagined if my own observations had not given me proof. Even the late distressing circumstances have, I believe, chiefly arisen, because she was obliged to be more absent from the school-room than before. Mary knows that she possesses my gratitude, and love, and esteem," added Mrs. Carter; "she will not require any assurances of them now; I would rather speak, my children, to any among you, who may be expecting to succeed her. Her influence may be yours, if only you will seek it in the same way. I think you must all know what that way is—you must all feel that it is good example. But, perhaps, some of you will not be inclined to think with me, that it is a very serious matter, whether this example is or is not set. Yet, I am sure, that if Mary were asked how it was that she was able to keep such a watch over herself, she would say that it

was because watchfulness was made the subject of her daily prayers, because she knew that her position in the school was a trust given her, not by me, nor by you, but by God : and that she must one day answer to Him for the manner in which she had exercised it. This was her view of the office she undertook. It is my earnest hope, that such may be the view of whoever may succeed her." Mrs. Carter paused ; involuntarily her eye rested upon Ruth. It was a glance of calm satisfaction and approval.

Ruth was leaning her head against the wall ; her fingers played nervously with a bouquet of flowers which had been placed near her ; her face was bent down, and Mary was turning towards her, half unmindful of the public praise which she was receiving, in her desire to read the secrets of Ruth's heart.

"I would not mar the cheerfulness of your spirits, my children," once more continued Mrs. Carter, "by the anxious thoughts which are crowding upon mine, and I can scarcely expect that any, even the most serious-minded, should think of the choice now to be made as I think of it ; but, upon whomsoever that choice may now fall, she may be certain that both my sister and myself shall look with gratitude and affection upon every endeavour after right conduct ; that we shall aid her to the very utmost of our power, and pray for her with a sincerity of affection and interest which even the love of a parent can scarcely surpass. Now may the blessing of God be with you, my children, especially, most especially, upon her whom you are about to elect to be your example and guide."

There was a deep stillness when the last words were spoken, and Mrs. Carter resumed her seat. Mary Vernon touched Ruth's hand ; it was of an icy coldness, and she did not move.

"Jessie," said Mrs. Carter, in a lighter tone than before, "I hear you are to be the first to give your vote."

Jessie sprang forward, exclaiming, "I vote for Ruth;" but she was stopped.

"Hush! hush! no one must tell," exclaimed Fanny Wilson. "Where is your paper? Is the name written?"

Jessie produced her paper, and walking up to the table, laid it in the vase, turning round as she did so to nod and smile meaningly at Ruth; and then, according to Fanny Wilson's direction, proceeding into the inner room, and taking her seat by the side of the judge's chair. Ellen Hastings followed, then another, and another, slowly, regularly, and silently.

Though the election was almost certainly determined beforehand, a sudden awe and suspense had stolen over them.

"It is Ruth's turn; Ruth must vote herself," exclaimed Alice, as Madeline moved into the inner room.

Mrs. Carter turned to her sister with a smile. "Ruth will be in a difficulty," she said; "her vote will be the exception."

"Ruth! why does she not come?" inquired one or two impatiently from the inner room.

"They are waiting, dear Ruth; look up," whispered Mary Vernon. "Ruth, dear, do speak," she continued.

Ruth raised her head hurriedly. "My turn! did they say it was my turn?"

"Yes, yours; but the others shall go before you. Harriet and Florence, it is for you to vote next;" and Harriet and Florence passed on in order.

"My turn now," said Mary, smiling. She placed her paper with the others, and then returned to Ruth.

"I must go ; I shall vote for Fanny," said Ruth. She tried to rise, but her limbs shook, and she caught the back of the chair.

"It is too much excitement, we must not let it go on," said Mrs. Carter, speaking across the table to her sister. "Ruth, my love, stay where you are ; Mary, you bring her vote."

Ruth's paper was placed with the rest.

"Now," said Mrs. Carter, as she stood up again ; "we will read the names and count."

The party in the inner room crowded near.

Mrs. Carter drew the vase towards her, and began to open the papers "Ruth ! it is only Ruth ; scarcely more than one name. But for form's sake we must count.

Mrs. Carter repeated the names in an audible voice.

Madeline could contain her delight no longer, and rushing forward, she threw herself upon Ruth's neck. "Oh ! Ruth ! the pleasure—if papa and mamma were but here !"

Ruth smiled ; it was a ghastly smile.

Hark ! what sounds were those ? The noise of carriage-wheels—the opening of a gate, the quick trampling of horses' feet, the thundering knock and pealing bell.

A hush of expectation ! Ruth sank back in her chair, resting as a prisoner reprieved.

Dawson entered, and said something in a low tone to Mrs. Carter.

"It will soon be over ; can you keep up ?" whispered Mary Vernon to Ruth.

Ruth nodded assent.

"Who can it be ? A visitor ? How provoking !" were the murmurs which went round.

"Silence ! Mrs. Carter is returning ; it is her step." But it was not her step.

"Dear Ruth, shall I ask for you to go away?" inquired Madeline.

The answer was a faint sharp cry, and Ruth started from her seat.

Madeline's glance followed hers. "Papa! our own papa!" she rushed forward.

Mr. Clifford was at the door.

"Papa come! my dear papa!" Madeline threw herself into his arms.

He held her, kissed her tenderly, again and again; but his eye wandered. "Ruth, my darling Ruth! my treasure!"

Cold, upright, still, Ruth stood—but for one instant only; the next, and she was kneeling at Mrs. Carter's feet in penitence and shame. "I hid the book; forgive me; speak for me; ask him to forgive me. It was not Janet; I did it. Oh! speak to him. He will not kiss me; speak for me, forgive me." Ruth hid her face, and burst into an agony of tears.

"Ruth! my child!" Mr. Clifford drew near, and would have raised her, but she turned her head away from him.

"He must not love me. I have deceived; I have done so wrongly. Oh! Madeline, stay with me, do not all leave me." Ruth's voice failed her.

Mr. Clifford lifted her up, and placed her in a chair, and then, with a look of intense anxiety, appealed to Mrs. Carter for an explanation.

Mary Vernon came near and supported Ruth's head upon her shoulder, and whispered; "Ruth, dearest, for your papa's sake be calm; tell him if you can. No one but yourself knows what this means." She stooped and kissed Ruth's forehead, and Ruth, soothed by the expression of sympathy at such a moment, made an effort at self-command.

"Shall we be together alone, my child?" said

Mr. Clifford in a tone the very quietness of which proved the agitation of his mind ; but Ruth shook her head. Her lips quivered, and again her tears fell fast ; but now they were quiet tears, bitter but salutary, the relief of an over-burdened mind. " I will tell here, papa," she said, as she held her father's hand and spoke in a broken voice ; and then leaving her seat she stood, still clasping her father's hand, and stealthily raising her eye to his in doubt and fear.

" You are right, Ruth," replied Mr. Clifford ; " right to confess before all, if in the knowledge of all you have offended."

" But it may be too much for her," interposed Mrs. Carter.

" She will bear it," said Mr. Clifford. " She will be happier afterwards. Ruth, can you tell us now ?" And Ruth waited but for an instant, and then in a rapid yet firm voice, she owned her fault and its consequences. She told of her search after the missing volume ; the temptation to which she yielded in reading it ; the shame which seized her ; and the impulse of fear which induced her to hide the book ; the impossibility afterwards of restoring it to its former place ; and the weakness of principle, and pride of heart, which had induced her to keep the secret of her conduct concealed ; and to allow another to be blamed unjustly for her offence. The confession was without evasion or excuse ; it was listened to in breathless silence. Madeline's eyes were riveted on her sister's pale face, and Alice's chain was twisted with nervous eagerness. Ruth stopped, and Madeline sprang forward and exclaimed, " She is best still ; no one would have told as she has done."

Mr. Clifford held up his finger to check her. " Stay, Madeline ; Ruth has grievously sinned. We will hope and pray that she may be forgiven, and as he said this he turned towards Mrs. Carter. Whilst Ruth

was recounting the history of her fault, Mrs. Carter's manner had been that of quiet, fixed attention. Her head was bent forward to catch each word as it fell, and not a muscle of her face moved.

"Can Mrs. Carter forgive?" said Mr. Clifford, and he drew Ruth forward. Mrs. Carter looked up; tears were dimming her eyes; tears for Ruth's sin.

"God forgive you, even as I do, my own Ruth," she said. Mr. Clifford's hand rested upon his child's head, in the attitude of blessing. His lips moved in prayer. Ruth's glance was raised for an instant. She would have stepped forward, she would have taken the hand which Mrs. Carter extended towards her, but her head grew confused and her eyelids fell, and she caught her father's arm, and almost unconscious from excitement and misery of feeling, was carried from the room.

It was towards evening before Mr. Clifford thought it desirable to see Ruth again. She was then lying on the sofa in Mrs. Carter's study, where she had been taken to be free from the possibility of interruption or excitement. There could be no doubt that she was penitent; that she was conscious of the offence of which she had been guilty, in the sight of God as well as before man. Ruth's heart once softened all her holier feelings returned. The veil had fallen from her eyes, and she saw herself in her true light. There were many reasons, however, to be afraid for the future. Ruth's fault was a very subtle one. It would recur continually in different shapes; it might sometimes assume the appearance of a virtue. Nothing but watchfulness, sincere and unremitting, would enable her to guard against it. And Ruth could scarcely be expected to practise such watchfulness. She had as yet given but slight proofs of ever having attempted it; and at school, the temptations to forgetfulness were very great.

Mr. Clifford had left home almost with a determination that this should be the last half-year which his children should spend at school. An occasion had offered itself for resuming his former plans. Mrs. Clifford's sister was about to return to England, in consequence of her husband's ill health. It was Mrs. Beresford's wish to spend the year which they were to pass in England with them. This would give Mrs. Clifford the opportunity of again devoting herself to her two little girls, and by the time Captain and Mrs. Mordaunt went back to India, and Mrs. Beresford again became an inmate of Laneton, Ruth and Madeline would have reached an age when they would not so much require the constant care of a governess, and might without difficulty pursue their studies at home, under their mother's inspection. Mr. Clifford's only doubt as to this arrangement had arisen from the progress which his children appeared to have made at school. They were improving rapidly in general acquirements, and he had not as yet discovered that their minds had received any injury. He could not help trusting that Mrs. Carter's high principles and warm interest in her pupils had succeeded in so raising the tone of the school that his children might still be safe there. But this day's experience had undeceived him. Whatever a school-life might be for others, even for Madeline, it was evidently undesirable for Ruth. The pride of her character required a constant guard, such a guard as Mrs. Carter, with all her endeavours, would scarcely be able to keep. Where there were so many to superintend, it was not possible that unremitting attention should be bestowed upon any one, and, after a long consultation with Mrs. Carter herself, it was decided by both that the departure of Ruth and Madeline should be final.

"They must return with me to-morrow," said Mr.

Clifford, as he left Mrs. Carter to seek Ruth in the study. "The business which called me to town, and made me break in upon you so unexpectedly, will also oblige me not to delay longer than I can help. I can scarcely wish to do so ; my poor child's position will be so painful."

Mrs. Carter could not but agree, though the idea of parting with the children weighed heavily upon her mind. Perhaps never, till the moment of Ruth's confession, had she known how entirely she trusted and loved her. "And poor Alice!" she said, "without her young companions, what will she do?"

"I had a conversation with Lady Catharine Hyde, before I left home," replied Mr. Clifford. "It seemed right to inform her of my possible determination ; but it will make no difference to her. She is too fixed in her plan. Alice is to be educated at school till she has passed her fifteenth birth-day."

"It may be best," said Mrs. Carter, after a short consideration. "There is much that is good in Alice ; she has begun to resist temptation, to act upon principle. Lady Catharine may be assured, that no care of mine shall be wanting."

"And she will receive from you that which she much needs," replied Mr. Clifford ; I mean affection. It is love by which Alice must be governed. It would be an inexpressible satisfaction to me to feel that she would receive it at the Manor."

Mrs. Carter faintly smiled. "We must hope," she answered, "that as Alice grows older, she may be able to understand the warmth that lies hidden by a cold manner. I think she does in a manner now."

"Poor child!" said Mr. Clifford, sighing. "It would grieve me to think of her loneliness, but that one learns to trust all these things to a Higher Power."

"I have great hopes of her,—unstable though her

character is," continued Mrs. Carter. "The time may be long, and the effort required may be great, but I do believe, that hereafter she will be all that she could wish, like—" Mrs. Carter stopped suddenly, and Mr. Clifford as he opened the door said, "Children little imagine the pain their faults cause. Ruth may be very unhappy, but she would scarcely exchange feelings with me." Mr. Clifford went to Ruth. She was lying still and exhausted. She could not bear to look at her papa; she trembled when he spoke to her; her eyelids were swollen with crying. Mr. Clifford's manner was, at first, grave, and it might even have been thought stern. He had no wish to make Ruth a heroine. He did not feel, and he did not desire her to feel, that a late repentance and confession were virtues. Forgive he could, fully and freely, but he did not conceal that he was deeply pained and disappointed. Ruth felt more alive to the true state of her own heart, when her father talked over her fault quietly, and examined into it, and discussed it, than she had done under the great excitement of the morning. Feeling then had carried her through all; she could have confessed worse faults; she could have humbled herself infinitely more; she could have endured any punishment: but the probability would have been, that, when the passionate burst of distress was over, the original fault would have resumed its power. All great exhibitions of feeling are to be dreaded. There may be a theatrical show of repentance, as well as of zeal or affection. Ruth's tears now were very quiet and very real. A short time convinced Mr. Clifford of this, and then he turned to the point to which he especially desired to direct her mind. "There is no occasion for me, my dear Ruth," he said, "to tell you against Whom you have sinned; that you know as fully as I do.

But, when you said your prayers, did the thought never enter your mind, that they were a mockery?" Ruth seemed shocked at the expression. "Yes, indeed they were a mockery," continued Mr. Clifford. "They were the prayers of a double mind; of a heart conscious of sin, yet unwilling to forsake it. Ruth, my child, it would have made me very miserable if I had known this."

"Papa, I did try to attend sometimes," said Ruth.

"Attend to the meaning of the words, perhaps; but the feeling, the sincerity, the hearty wish, they must have been absent. God will never accept our prayers without them; and if we do not pray we cannot be safe under his protection; and then, Ruth, it might have been the will of God that during those sad days you should die."

Ruth shuddered, and, looking up in her father's face, said,—

"Papa, I have prayed now."

"And I have prayed too, Ruth," replied Mr. Clifford, as he stooped to kiss her. "I am sure we must both be happier."

A faint gleam of pleasure passed over Ruth's pale face. She placed her hand within her father's, and he held it fondly.

"Papa," she said, venturing to raise her eyes to his, "perhaps God will forgive me for your prayers."

"For the prayers of One who loves you infinitely better than I or any other human being can ever do, my darling child," replied Mr. Clifford.

"For our Saviour's sake," murmured Ruth.

For an instant Mr. Clifford paused. The expression of his face was that of intense thought—more than thought, devotion.

"Ruth," he said at length, "you cannot tell, you can scarcely think, the gratitude which that love

demands. To be forgiven! to have offended deeply, as we all offend, and to sin, not once or twice, but every hour! to act against warnings and instructions wilfully, and still to have hope! to know, from the very words of our blessed Lord, that, 'even unto seventy times seven,' there is pardon, if only we repent, and trust, and pray. My own dear child, shall we not both try to show our love also?"

Ruth could not find a voice to answer.

"For you there is one way above all others," continued Mr. Clifford. "Will you watch yourself, Ruth? watch your thoughts?—there lies the origin of your sin—very, very deep—in your wishes; coveting admiration and human applause; thinking upon it; allowing yourself to put it before you as a point to be obtained. You wished for power and influence, such as Mary Vernon's; that you have acknowledged. God had placed you in an inferior position, and you desired a higher one. You would not have taken any wrong means to obtain it, but you suffered your thoughts to dwell upon it. The sins of our wishes are more ensnaring than any others. Covetousness, which is ranked with stealing and murder, is but the sin of a wish. Will you, my child, tell me that you will watch yourself?"

Ruth's "yes" was not very intelligible; but her father read her thoughts in her countenance, and was satisfied.

"For the future," he said, "you must make strict rules; one in particular, against day-dreams. We wish: then we indulge ourselves in fancying how it would be if we were to obtain our wishes; then the wish becomes stronger, and grows into a real longing desire; and at last we act. Check your day dreams. Check every thought of what people may say or think of you. Never repeat praise to yourself; when you hear it, try to remember how differ-

ent you are in the sight of God, how unworthy even when you do your best. If you can do this, even in a slight degree, you will have taken a great step towards overcoming the defects of your natural character. If you do not, you may humble yourself to the dust before your fellow creatures, but you will not be humble in the eye of God."

"Papa, I will try," said Ruth.

"And pray," continued Mr. Clifford; "and then," he added, reverently, "we will both pray; now, shall we not, Ruth?"

Ruth clasped her hands together, and knelt by the side of her father, whilst, in the language of the Church, fervently, though in a low and faltering voice, Mr. Clifford acknowledged for his child that she had "erred and strayed from God's ways like a lost sheep; that she had left undone those things which she ought to have done, and had done those things which she ought not to have done;" and entreated that the "God who is always more ready to hear than we to pray, would pour down upon her the abundance of his mercy; forgiving her those things whereof her conscience was afraid, and giving her those good things which she was not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ."

CHAPTER III.

THE wakening of the next morning was a wakening to pain and regret with many besides Ruth. To be disappointed in those we have respected, is a grief early experienced and long remembered. Ruth's fault was little spoken of, for it was felt too deeply. Those who might have been inclined to criticise and discuss it were checked, if by no other consideration, by the presence of Madeline.

Poor Madeline! It was sad indeed to see her, so downcast, so shy; shrinking from observation, and clinging only to Alice, as if she herself had been guilty. Alice's sympathy fully went with Madeline. Ruth's confession was startling to her; it seemed a dream. She looked around, and thought for the moment that honesty and truth were nowhere to be found. When Ruth had failed, upon whom could dependence be placed? To see Janet Harding distressed and irritated her. She knew that the feeling was unfair, but there was a general re-action now in favour of Janet, who had never yet been a favourite. A sense of justice made all willing to atone for any past unkindness, by showing that they were sorry for the false accusation. And it was difficult for Janet to take this notice quietly. She was a little inclined to play the heroine; to talk of all she had gone through; to repeat again and again how surprised she had felt when the book was discovered in her drawer; until at length Alice could bear it no longer, and impatiently begged her to remember that, after all, no one had thought much about her, and

Mrs. Carter had scarcely taken the trouble to scold her. If she had been punished, it was certain that Ruth would have spoken long before. Janet was silenced for the time, and when she re-commenced, Alice took refuge with Madeline and Mary Vernon.

But neither the trials of Madeline nor Alice, as regarded their companions, were to be of long continuance. By twelve o'clock everything was to be ready for departure. Alice was to go at the same time. She and Mary alone knew that Ruth and Madeline were not to return. The others looked upon the parting merely as the ordinary separation for the holidays. Alice's heart was already so heavy that this additional weight was less felt than it would otherwise have been. She did not then realize what school would be without her favourite companions; she was conscious that something was added to the shadow which already seemed cast over everything; but the holidays were come, and her return appeared far off, and she would not dwell upon it. Madeline had room in her heart but for one thought: Ruth would leave school in disgrace, and her mamma must know it. The delights of home were all marred by the idea, which, however, Madeline kept to herself, whilst brooding upon it and grieving over it, lest by speaking of it she should add to her sister's sorrow.

The good-conduct prizes were to be given the next day; but Alice had no regret for being absent, the prizes were nothing to her now; and Madeline forgot that she was certain of one; and when Mrs. Carter placed a book in her hand, and kissed her, and thanked her for the good example she had set, she laid it silently on the table and cried.

"Is Miss Clifford nearly ready?" inquired Dawson, coming to the door of the bedroom as the clock in the hall struck half-past eleven.

Ruth was assisting Mary Vernon in packing her

carpet-bag—that is, she appeared to assist, in reality she did nothing. She did not know what to take up, what to fetch; she brought the wrong things, and carried them back, and then sat down to rest, looking round the room in despair of ever being ready; and at last fairly giving up; she threw her arms around Mary, and exclaimed, bitterly,—

“Oh, Mary! if it were not the last time! if I could come back! if Mrs. Carter could see that I was sorry! Will papa consent? do you think he will?”

Mary shook her head.

“It would not be good for you, dearest Ruth. He said so last night.”

“Disgrace!” murmured Ruth; “and they will talk of me and tell about it. Mary, are you sure you love me? Don’t you despise me like the rest?”

“Despise you, Ruth! No; how could I? No one despises you.”

“But they look at me,” continued Ruth; “and Madeline speaks differently even, and Alice; and what will mamma say?”

“Dearest Ruth, can you not think of these things differently—patiently, I mean; like a punishment? You know we are bound to bear punishment well. It would please your papa if you could; and, more than that, it would please God.”

Ruth’s face assumed a calmer expression.

“Shame is my punishment,” she said, in a humble tone.

“And it may be said a blessing,” added Mary. “Ruth, you may have had a warning now for your whole life.”

“Mamma!” repeated Ruth, in a tone of deep anguish.

Mary looked at her with compassion.

“I shall hear from you,” said Ruth, making an

effort to change the current of her thoughts ; “ and perhaps you will come and stay with us. Papa said he would ask you.”

“ Yes, indeed I will come if I may, and we will write constantly, and Alice will return to tell what is going on here ; and I am to have a letter from Mrs. Carter when she has time. Dear Ruth, we must be friends all our lives.”

“ Friends, if I deserve it,” said Ruth, in an under voice, and she turned away unable to utter another word.

“ Five packages, three boxes, and two bags ; is that all ?” inquired Mr. Clifford.

He stood in the hall, striving to appear unconcerned. Mrs. Carter was with him at the dining-room door. Ruth came slowly down the stairs, followed by Madeline and Mary.

“ Alice ! where is Alice ?” inquired Mr. Clifford.

“ In the school-room, waiting, I believe,” said Mrs. Carter. “ My children, you have no time to spare.”

Ruth remained in the hall hesitating. Madeline looked round for her.

“ Dear Ruth, you must come,” she whispered.

Mary put one hand affectionately on Ruth’s shoulder, and with the other opened the school-room door. Ruth stepped before her sister. There was a noise in the school-room ; business going on, and parting words with Alice. Ruth cast around her a nervous, agitated glance. The memories of the eventful years of her school-life seemed crowded into that one moment ;—the memories, and the feelings they called forth,—shame, regret, disappointed hopes, neglected opportunities—they were all there. Madeline went up to Alice and spoke. Jessie O’Neile heard her, and exclaimed,—

“ It is Ruth ! they are going !”

A general rush followed, to say good-b'ye to Ruth. Good-b'ye ! a cordial, kind good-b'ye ; one in which no bitterness nor reproach, no thoughts of pride nor of self-exaltation were mingled. Janet Harding kept Ruth's hand fast in hers. She was afraid to express more than common feeling.

"In six weeks you will be here again, Ruth," said little Jessie.

Alice forgot the injunction of secrecy. Her own heart grew heavy and she exclaimed,—

"No, Jessie, never ! they are going for good."

"Not to come back ! Ruth, my own dear Ruth ! Fanny, Janet, Florence, do you hear ?" and Jessie caught Ruth's dress, and looked up in her face, with an expression of wondering grief.

Ruth's lip quivered. She felt that in another moment her self-command would be gone.

"Kiss me, Janet," said Madeline, who made no effort to restrain her sorrow. "You will all write to us, and we shall so want to know. Florence, perhaps you will hear about poor Clara, as you live near ; and will you tell us if you ever meet Justine ; and about the prizes, and the new girls next half year ? But Alice will be able to tell that."

Alice was sadly lonely at the thought.

"Maddy, I cannot bear you to go," exclaimed Janet. "Every one is going that I cared for."

"But, Alice, you will be here after the holidays ?" said Florence.

Alice could scarcely bear to answer yes. Yet there was one comfort ; the hope that the next half-year might be happier and better than the last. The future !—Alice lived in the future. She was ever intending, and ever resolving. Her intentions satisfied her now ; their fulfilment it remained for time to show.

Madeline drew Alice away ; then paused at the

door to take one more look. Ruth slowly followed, Jessie still clinging to her side. Janet Harding was standing between the two school-rooms, looking after them. Ruth heard her father's voice; but her heart was full with one sad, bitter thought. She withdrew herself suddenly from little Jessie, and turned to speak the last words to Janet.

"Janet, have you forgiven? are you quite sure? It was dreadfully wrong, and I am so very, very sorry."

Janet gave the kiss of hearty forgiveness fondly, almost with a feeling that pardon was uncalled for. Ruth struggled vainly with her tears.

"Now Jessie, darling, good-b'ye! Write to me, won't you?"

Madeline and Alice returned to hasten her.

"Good-b'ye, once more, all of you."

A last look! a last smile! and the door of the school-room closed after them, and they stood in the hall, but one more parting before them; it was the hardest of all; from Mrs. Carter, her sister, and Mary. Ruth was thankful that it was short; thankful that she was spared a longer trial of the self-reproach which the blessing of the true, kind friend whom she had grieved, could not but cause her. And Madeline was thankful also; for Ruth, for her father, and, even more than all, for Mrs. Carter; for the prayer that God would guard them through their future life was broken and inaudible. The last gaze at the old familiar walls was denied to Ruth. Her head was bowed down with shame; her eyes were dimmed and scorched with tears. But Madeline looked with Alice from the window of the carriage, to watch Mary Vernon standing upon the steps, Mrs. Carter and Miss Barnard behind her, and Dawson looking over the blinds; and when the carriage passed the gate, she still dwelt upon the

outline of the home she had left, its projections, windows, chimneys, until at length—it was the final recollection which Madeline retained of Mrs. Carter's house—her eye rested upon the half-opened window of the little dressing-room. Might it not have whispered to her in the peace of her own conscience, that prayer—humble, simple, earnest prayer—was to be the safeguard of her future life, even as it had been her protection amidst the temptations of a school?

CHAPTER IV.

THERE WAS a small but cheerful room on the south side of the old Manor House of Haseley. It looked out upon the quaint garden; the raised terrace with the summer-house at its extremity, the trim gravel walks bordered by flower-beds, and the circle of turf in the centre, in which all the different paths were made to terminate. Alice Lennox was seated at the open window of this room; but she saw with indifference the beauty of the bright summer morning. Though the flowers were brilliant and the trees full of foliage, and though the sky was deeply blue, softened by a few thin feathery clouds, and the fresh dew glittered in the sunshine which flickered upon the grass—all was as nothing to her. She did not seem to hear the songs of the birds, or notice the glancing of the butterflies; and the gardener, who was trimming the turf near the house, worked unweariedly with his smooth, sharp-cutting scythe, without once attracting her attention. She was not thinking of these things of caring for them; and soon she turned away to survey the comforts of her own apartment.

Lady Catharine Hyde had selected it especially for her, and fitted it up with all which she deemed most likely to promote her goodness and her happiness. Alice could not be insensible to the thought thus bestowed upon her. Books were there, her favourites—such as she would herself have chosen:—

and others of history, travels, English and foreign classics, with which it was désirable she should be acquainted. A work-table, a flower-stand, a piano, a writing-case, a drawing-box also ;—it seemed that there was nothing further needed—nothing for occupation and interest, little even for affection, for, gazing upon Alice, as she suffered her glance to wander around the room, was the sweet, gentle, holy face of the mother whom she had so early lost, so long regretted. Alice's attention was fixed, as for an instant she dwelt upon it, and rising, she left her station by the window and stood before it.

Her mother's picture! blessed and hallowed were its associations—beautiful and pure as a dream of heaven! Alice's eyes were dimmed by tears, and with a sudden impulse of right feeling and energy, she roused herself from the listlessness which was creeping over her, and with the exclamation, "Yes, I must really try," began to busy herself in arranging the furniture so as best to suit her convenience.

It was Alice's first day at home ; but the Manor scarcely seemed to her like home. Her heart was at school, with her companions, her pursuits, the interests which for more than five years had been engrossing to her. Now she was to begin a new life ; and what was it to be? Many times in the course of that morning did Alice leave her employment to ponder upon this question. At her age there are few who would not have done the same ; for there are few upon whom care has so early pressed that they cannot recall a time when the world seemed a fairy land, life but one uninterrupted summer, when imagination provided for them wealth, and honour, and deep unchanging affection, and they found but one drawback to their vision of happiness—that it

was not present, but to come ; that the hour before them was dull and tame, and the future, which they might never reach, bright as a scene of enchantment. So it was then with Alice Lennox.

The book-shelves were soon put into disorder. Alice thought that she could arrange the volumes better, and they were taken down and laid upon the floor. The work-table occupied the position best fitted for the flower-stand ; both were moved into the centre of the room. There were particular boxes, bags, small ornaments, which she had collected at school ; these were brought from her bedroom and distributed amongst the chairs. The chairs themselves were not placed as well as they might be, or as she fancied they might be, and they were twisted and turned, and at last left in confusion till the remainder of the furniture should be settled. When all this was done, Alice grew weary and rather cross, and sat down to rest. Solitude was dull, and she thought of Ruth and Madeline Clifford. Lady Catharine had assured her they would be with her in the course of the day. But the morning was a busy time with them ; probably they would not be able to come till the afternoon, and then, perhaps, not to stay. This was not like the constant companionship of school, and Alice sighed as her thoughts reverted to the scenes she had left, and again she drew her chair to the window, and sat down to indulge in a reverie and a day-dream.

We will give but one passing illustration of the nature of Alice's thoughts. The "castles in the air" of a girl of sixteen, just set free from school, are not likely to be profitable to the world in general any more than to herself. Alice had not passed untainted through the ordeal of a school life. She had in her mind the usual romance of gaiety and admiration, of

wealth and luxury. Her "castle in the air" was, in other words, only the indulgence of her vanity; but she had not yet learnt to examine her thoughts, and purify and subdue them: they were pleasant thoughts, and she was satisfied.

She imagined herself in a ball-room—large, brilliantly lighted, decked with evergreens and flowers; crowds of elegantly dressed persons walking up and down, or seated upon benches watching the different parties who were about to begin dancing. Music was heard, but not loud enough to drown conversation. Alice could catch even the faintest whispers of her own fancy. She herself was in imagination one of the dancers, and amongst the most likely of all to attract notice. Elegant, graceful, clever, interesting—these were common words when applied to herself; and then ensued supposed conversations with her partners; a compliment, and an answer, and another compliment; light words, and sharp observations upon others; and soon, the dispersion of the company—the return home—the events of the next day—a party of pleasure, with the same persons anxious to be with her—the same consciousness of being admired. We will not follow her further.

"Alice," said the grave authoritative voice of Lady Catharine Hyde, "this is not the way to get on in the world; it is nearly one o'clock."

Alice started, blushed, and began an excuse.

"Your room must not be left in this state, my dear. I shall expect to see it look very different before luncheon."

The door closed with rather a hasty sound. Alice checked the exclamation which rose to her lips, and recommenced her work with a different spirit; not dreamy, but fretted into energy. The present was before her now, recalled, as if by a spell, by Lady

Catharine's words. The gong sounded precisely as the church clock struck one. Alice placed the last set of books neatly on the shelf, and ran down stairs. Lady Catharine was waiting for her in the dark oak-panelled dining-room; standing at a round table at the upper end, upon which the luncheon was prepared.

"I shall hope to see you more orderly, by and by, my dear," she said, as Alice took her seat. "We are to lead a regular life now—not as it used to be when you were running wild in the holidays. I like you to be in the drawing-room five minutes before luncheon, and then we can come in together. What will you have? Some cold meat?"

"Only some bread and butter, thank you," replied Alice; and she began to eat in silence.

"You are tired, my dear," said Lady Catharine. "Marsham would have helped you, if you had asked her."

"No, not tired at all, thank you," answered Alice; and silence followed again.

"I shall like to talk to you about your studies to-morrow," observed Lady Catharine, after a long pause. "I shall wish to fix hours for your different pursuits. It will not do to give up the discipline of school all at once; and your friends, Ruth and Madeline, are very industrious."

"They are not as old as I am," remarked Alice.

"Not quite; but I think they are more forward. It struck me, from some observations I made in the summer, that Ruth was much better informed in English history than you are."

"We read history every day with Mrs. Carter," replied Alice.

"Very probably; but I am afraid you were careless. I shall beg Mr. Clifford to mark out a course

of reading for you, such as he would give to his own children."

Alice made no reply, but helped herself to some more bread; refusing, with a certain tone of pettishness, the cake which Lady Catharine offered—indeed pressed her to take.

"I am sure you must have fagged yourself," began Lady Catharine again; "your appetite is not half as good as it was yesterday: or have you a headache? You must tell me, my dear, directly you feel at all ill."

Alice declared herself free from indisposition of every kind, and, wishing to divert notice from herself, remarked that she was glad it was settled for Mr. Clifford's sister, Mrs. Mordaunt, not to go back to India; and she supposed that her mother would live with her still.

Lady Catharine said that she believed that was the arrangement; and it certainly seemed the best. The Parsonage was too small to accommodate her comfortably.

"And Madeline and Ruth will keep their school-room," observed Alice. "They were to have given it up if Mrs. Beresford had come back."

Lady Catharine said pointedly, that a school-room was a very great comfort to them; they made so much use of it.

Alice foresaw a little good advice; and, to avoid it, wondered why neither Ruth nor Madeline had been to see her.

"They seldom pay visits in the morning, my dear, you know; so there is no occasion to wonder about it. They will be here presently, I have no doubt. We will wait for them till three, and if they do not come by that time, we must go out. And, remember, three will be our usual walking hour, till the weather becomes too warm. Finish your luncheon quickly.

and then go and complete your work. I should like everything to be in order before your friends come."

Alice began to eat more diligently than before, not raising her eyes from her plate. Lady Catharine showed no further desire for conversation; the luncheon concluded as it had begun, almost in silence, and then Alice once more retired to her own room.

Little remained to be done in arranging it; but Alice was not inclined to be industrious. After the lapse of about twenty minutes, Lady Catharine appeared again in the doorway.

"Alice, my dear, have you nearly finished? I see the Miss Cliffords coming down the avenue."

Alice threw down a book which she had been—not reading, but idly looking through, and walked about the room, doing nothing in reality, though apparently very busy. Lady Catharine watched her for some seconds, and presently took from her hands a work-box, which had been moved three different times in the course of a few minutes, and putting it decidedly in the centre of the table, said, "There, my dear, that will do; now go to something else." A ring at the hall bell was just then heard. Lady Catharine looked annoyed. "I am vexed your young friends should find you in such disorder; you are a sad dawdle, Alice. I wonder Mrs. Carter was not more particular with you; however—" the end of the sentence was left in doubt; but Lady Catharine gave Alice a kiss and went away.

Alice did really exert herself then. She did not wish, any more than Lady Catharine, that the first impression of her room should be unfavourable. She contrived to hide the principal deficiencies whilst the servant was answering the door, and then she sat down in an easy attitude, as if it was quite natural to be there, and waited with some degree of impatience for the entrance of her friends.

Ruth and Madeline Clifford, now more than fifteen years of age, were but little altered in feature and general appearance from what they were at twelve. Ruth's thoughtful blue eye still told of a mind which naturally looked beyond the outer surface of all which she saw and heard; her mouth still spoke of energy and resolution; the turn of her head was not entirely free from hauteur. She had grown tall and slight; her manners were peculiarly quiet, and marked by a natural grace and refinement which no education could have given. And Madeline was still the bright-eyed, simple, true-hearted child; whose words were eager, and her laugh full of glee; whose colour came and went with every variation of her quick feelings; and who seemed to have no care, except that those she loved should be happy; and to be about to pass over the troubled sea of life with a light, buoyant, hopeful spirit, which trials could not overwhelm.

Madeline stepped before Ruth as they entered the morning room. She threw her arms round Alice's neck, kissed her heartily, and smiled with unfeigned delight as she looked at the wonderful change which the apartment had undergone since she was last in it. Ruth's was a calmer greeting, though not less affectionate, and the first observation she made afterwards was one scarcely addressed to Alice. It was spoken as her eye caught the picture of Mrs. Lennox.

"Yes, Alice, you can never think now that Lady Catharine does not love you."

Alice withdrew her hand, which she had laid upon Ruth's shoulder, and with a gesture of impatience pushed aside the box in the centre of the table.

"Love me! oh yes! every one says so; she loves me of course; and it is very nice. I don't think any of the girls at Mrs. Carter's would have a prettier room than this; do you think they would?"

"No, not any one, I am sure," exclaimed Madeline: "and as for our school-room at the Parsonage, it is not in the least to be compared to it. But, Alice, you must come there and like it, notwithstanding; it will be charming to read and be together always."

"Yes, if I am allowed," replied Alice.

"But you will be. Lady Catharine told papa that she wished us to be the greatest friends in the world."

Alice expected Ruth to second Madeline's words, but Ruth's manner was not quite satisfactory. She was examining a book on the table, and appeared not to have heard what passed; but Alice could not help thinking that she must have done so.

"And now, Alice, tell us something about school," said Ruth, putting down the volume. "Who will be going back next half-year?"

Alice enumerated the names. Many were those of personal strangers, but from time to time Alice had brought back descriptions which seemed to make them familiar acquaintances.

"Janet Harding stays another year," she said; "her mamma thinks her so wonderfully improved: and so she is in some things. She never quotes texts now, but she is awfully strict. Jessie O'Neile, you know, is gone home for good, because her papa is to live in Ireland; and Ellen Hastings is to be sent to another school because her papa is grown poor, and cannot afford to keep her at Mrs. Carter's; and—let me see—Fanny—oh! she is to come back for another half-year to be finished; but she never will be finished, she is just as odd and blunt as ever."

"And Harriet and Florence," said Madeline; "they are so old to be at school still!"

"They have left now," answered Alice. "Florence and I are great allies; she has much more in her

than we used to give her credit for; and she is so good-natured."

"Good-natured!" repeated Ruth; "I can fancy that: but as for having anything in her besides the Parisian fashions I don't believe it is possible."

"She is to come here to stay, perhaps—at least I am to get her here if I can," continued Alice, "Harriet, I don't much care for, she is dull undoubtedly; but Florence is up to anything."

Ruth smiled, and said:

"That is not any great charm, Alice; she may be up to mischief." Alice made no answer.

"I wish you did not like her," said Madeline.

"Why?" and Alice turned round rather sharply.

"Because I don't, that is all; and I should like us to like the same person."

Again Alice glanced at Ruth, as if expecting to receive a similar expression of interest from her; and again Ruth took no notice, and Alice sighed.

"And you are to be very regular, and study a great deal, I suppose, Alice?" inquired Ruth; "you have books enough. I see you have the same edition of Racine that papa has given us; shall you read by yourself, or with Lady Catharine?"

"I don't know; I cannot tell anything yet," replied Alice. "I have done nothing to-day but put my room in order."

"Papa means to talk to Lady Catharine about your taking a day at the school," said Madeline: "shall you like it?"

"Do you take one?" asked Alice, evading the question.

"Yes, for the little classes; and on Sundays, you know, we always go. Papa is a great deal at the school now, and has the elder girls at home, because of the Confirmation."

"We are to be confirmed," said Ruth, gravely.

"And you will be, too, Alice," observed Madeline. Alice's cheek flushed with a sudden excitement.

"And I shall be, too! Who says so?"

"Lady Catharine; she and papa were talking about it last Sunday."

Alice sat down quickly, and began to move the different articles on the table with an air of mingled nervousness and absence of mind. Madeline watched her attentively for a few seconds, and then going up to her, said kindly, "Alice, dear, something is the matter."

"No, nothing;" but Alice went on as before, and still in silence.

Madeline looked at Ruth for an explanation.

"Have we vexed you?" said Ruth, affectionately.

"We wish you would tell us."

Alice looked up sadly. "You have not vexed me, Ruth; that is, it is not your doing: but I was thinking of things, I don't know what precisely—a great many things. She is so particular—she interferes."

"She! Lady Catharine?" asked Madeline.

"Yes. It is very wrong to complain, I know; don't say that I talked about it: and she is very kind—she had this room quite ready for me when I came home last night. I thought I was going to be happy then."

"And are you not happy?" inquired Ruth, with evident sympathy.

"She interferes," repeated Alice. "You two cannot understand what I mean. Your papa and mamma are not after you always."

"Was Lady Catharine with you all this morning?" inquired Madeline.

"Not with me, but looking after me. She knew just what I was about; and she said something because I was not in the drawing-room five minutes before luncheon; and directly afterwards she sent

me up stairs, and told me exactly what I was to do. It is the same sort of thing which used to go on in the holidays, only it seems worse now I am come home for good."

"Perhaps Lady Catharine is particular now, to put you in the right way," suggested Madeline.

"It is not the being particular; Mrs. Carter was particular: it is the manner. But then it is wrong in me to care. I wish I did not feel it; I wish I was some one else; I wish—"

Alice's glance was involuntarily directed to her mother's picture; and she stopped, struggling to keep back her tears.

"Mamma will be like your own mamma, Alice dear," began Madeline; but Ruth interrupted her.

"No, Madeline; we must not say that; we must not put any one before Lady Catharine. And papa always declares that she does really love Alice dearly."

"Well, then, Alice, by and by you will be accustomed to it, and then you will not mind," said Madeline.

"Yes, but I shall; I cannot help it: and I am growing too old to be watched in that way; no one else is. Florence Trevelyan does just what she likes at home."

Ruth's look of compassion changed, at this speech, into one of surprise.

"But surely, Alice, Florence Trevelyan is no specimen of the good of doing as one likes."

"I don't know that," replied Alice, speaking more cheerfully, but not without irritation; "Florence Trevelyan has a great deal more sense, and principle too, than you give her credit for. Mrs. Carter says she is very much improved."

"Really!" exclaimed Ruth; "I suppose by that she must be altered."

"So, you would not believe me," observed Alice, with an air of pique.

"I would believe you in some things, a great many indeed; but about Florence—I think you are fond of her."

"Perhaps I am; she is very fond of me," replied Alice.

"And when persons are very fond of you, Alice, you always fancy them perfection."

"Couleur de rose, as Justine Le Vergnier used to say," remarked Madeline.

A faint tinge of red flushed Ruth's cheek at this name, and she inquired hastily, "Shall you walk this afternoon, Alice?"

"By and by, I believe. Do you know that Justine is gone out as a governess? I heard it just before I came away, from Signor Beretoni. We have never learnt anything else scarcely about her since Monsieur left off teaching at Mrs. Carter's. Mrs. Carter has been extremely strict about her. One of the girls told me that Monsieur would have given anything to have had her amongst us again."

Ruth became quite silent after this speech, and Madeline seemed conscious that the subject was a disagreeable one. After a little time, however, Ruth said, rather abruptly to Alice, "Then Lady Catharine has not mentioned the Confirmation to you, Alice."

"No, how should she? there has been no time."

"But she will, certainly," continued Madeline; "and it will be fixed for you to come to papa to be examined with us. You will not mind that, shall you?"

A slight restraint was visible in Alice's manner as she replied, "Not the examination; I can answer questions; but there are some things—Ruth, are you going to be very good after you are confirmed?"

Ruth coloured crimson, and Madeline answered for her.

"Ruth is very good now; a great deal better than you can guess, Alice."

Just then Marsham knocked at the door. She came up with a message.

"Lady Catharine was gone to prepare for her walk; she wished Miss Lennox to accompany her, and the Miss Cliffords could go with them to the Parsonage."

"Only to the Parsonage!" repeated Alice. "I thought we should have gone all together somewhere. And it is so hot for walking!"

She threw open the window wider, and declared there was not a breath of air, although at the same moment a soft breeze was fanning her cheek. Then she put a finishing stroke to the arrangement of the furniture, altered the order of the books, and again came back to the window.

"You will not dislike going out when you are dressed," said Ruth.

Alice would not take the hint. Madeline offered to fetch her bonnet and scarf, but was told that no one except Marsham knew where to find them; and Alice still delayed, leaning her head out of the window and sighing at the heat.

Marsham came again, with the information that Lady Catharine was waiting.

Alice's exclamation of impatience was accompanied by a complaint, that she was always worried and not allowed a moment's freedom; but this time neither Madeline nor Ruth sympathised with her.

CHAPTER V.

"RUTH, are you very much interested in your book?" said Mr. Clifford, as he came into the drawing-room at the Parsonage, that evening.

Ruth was alone. She laid down the volume, and answered, with a smile, "Papa, that means I am to talk."

"Well, perhaps it does. Why did you leave all the conversation to Madeline just now, when she was telling us of your visit to the Manor?"

"Madeline always knows what to say," replied Ruth; "and I do not."

"But in this case there could have been no difficulty; it was merely a straightforward history of fact."

Ruth paused, as if she did not quite agree. "I don't think it is quite straightforward, papa; at least, the facts puzzle me: that is why I do not talk."

"Because you do not understand your own feelings about Alice?" asked Mr. Clifford, in a tone of doubtful inquiry.

Ruth laughed. "Papa, you guess now just in the wonderful way you did when I was a little child. Do you think Alice is my friend?"

"Ah, Ruth! that is the secret; I was sure of it. You have been examining your feelings, and fretting yourself about them ever since your return."

"I ought to be certain," said Ruth. "I have known Alice all my life nearly."

"Known her in a degree—outwardly."

"But we were at school together, papa; and girls at school know each other intimately."

"That was some time ago, my dear Ruth; and a little time, at your age, will work great changes. Possibly, you may have been advancing in one direction, Alice in another. No wonder, then, that when you meet you do not thoroughly comprehend each other."

"We have met during the holidays," persisted Ruth.

"Yes, but at such seasons Alice did not, as it were, come in contact with you. She was more a visitor than a home companion; the trial of your friendship will be now."

Ruth repeated the word "friendship" in an under tone; and, after a few moment's thought, said: "Papa, I do not think I shall ever form a friendship for Alice;—not what I call friendship."

Mr. Clifford smiled: "And your notion of friendship, Ruth, is—what?"

"Ah, papa! I know you will laugh. Old people;—no, not old people, but grown-up people, always do, when girls talk of friendship."

"No, indeed, my dear child," and Mr. Clifford became grave in an instant, "I am the last person to laugh at anything involving such serious consequences. I merely smiled at the recollection of some romantic absurdities I have heard upon the subject; but they are not likely to be yours, Ruth: so tell me, what is your idea of friendship?"

"I don't think I can explain; I don't think I quite know myself: that is, I can feel it, but I cannot put it into words. Mamma would be like a friend, only she is so much older, and so much better, and she is 'mamma.'"

"And Miss Vernon; what of her?"

"Mary Vernon; yes, she would be a real friend; but she is so far away, and she is going to be married; I never have anything to do with her except by letters; and that is not satisfactory, though I like having her letters excessively."

"And Madeline?"

"Oh, papa! Madeline is myself; there is no one in all the world, like Madeline; no one could be. She is not my friend at all."

"Only your sister," said Mr. Clifford, with a half smile, which changed into an expression of fond interest, as Madeline, following her mother into the room, and drawing a footstool to the side of Ruth's chair, leant her head upon her lap, and whispered,

"Now, go on talking; I always like to hear you and papa talk."

Ruth smoothed the fair hair which clustered round her sister's face, and imprinted a kiss upon her forehead, and then turning to her mother, said, "Mamma, it is you who must explain; you always understand. What do I mean by a friend?"

"And why cannot Alice Lennox be Ruth's friend?" continued Mr. Clifford.

"We should have reached that point, only we were obliged to define friendship first of all."

"Ruth's notion of friendship is of a high, pure feeling," replied Mrs. Clifford; "respect as well as love."

"Yes, mamma, yes, exactly; that is just it: and I don't think I can respect Alice. She is very good-natured, I would not be unkind, I do like her very much, but sometimes—Maddy, you know"—

"Alice wishes to do right," said Madeline, sitting upright, and speaking energetically.

"Wishes! but she does not do it; she never did, that I can remember. It was the same at school; she was always wishing."

"Which is at least one point in her favour," said Mrs. Clifford, gently.

"Yes, but dear mamma, it is so tiresome to be with persons who do nothing but wish. It used to provoke me at school to hear Alice complaining of herself, and then to see her idle away her time just as much as ever."

"Patience! Ruth," said Mr. Clifford; "we need it ourselves."

"Yes, papa, of course; but for a friend, patience does not seem the right thing. One would like some one to make one better."

Mrs. Clifford turned to Madeline: "What do you say Madeline, my love; is not Alice your friend either?"

"I don't know, mamma; I never think whether she is or not. She is different from other people, more like a relation."

"But it is not a matter of course to like one's relations," observed Ruth, quickly.

"And Alice is cast off, then," said Mr. Clifford. There was melancholy in the tone of his voice, and which Ruth perceived.

"Papa, do you think I am wrong?" she asked.

"It would be hard to say that, my dear. I should be very sorry for you to have low ideas of friendship; yet I feel for Alice, she is so lonely."

"But, papa, surely you would not wish me to care for any one who has not right principles."

"There are different degrees in what you term caring, my dear Ruth. For your own sake I may be quite contented that you feel as you do."

"But Ruth would make her good," exclaimed Madeline; "because she makes every one good."

Ruth's eye sparkled brightly for an instant.

Mr. Clifford watched her attentively: "It is as well, perhaps, that things should be as they are," he

said, after a short silence. "It is a great trial for us all to be constantly and affectionately associated with those we cannot thoroughly respect. Ten years hence, Ruth, we may hope that you will be able to take an interest in such persons, without injury to yourself."

"Alice will be different after she is confirmed," observed Madeline.

"No, my dear Madeline," said Mr. Clifford; "Alice will not be different after her confirmation, unless she is different before it. Confirmation is what the word implies, a fixing or strengthening; but there must be a principle first of all to be fixed."

"Alice had a right principle given her once," said Madeline.

"Undoubtedly; but it may have been weakened, or, to speak more truly, the Holy Spirit may have been resisted."

"That has been the case with us all," said Madeline.

"In a measure, my love, at times; but there is a vast difference between persons who seem to live very much the same kind of lives. It is a difference in the will—not the wish merely, but the will; and it is the latter which is strengthened at confirmation. Almost all the young people who intend to come before the bishop, *wish* by and by to be good: but I am afraid there are comparatively very few who really *will* it."

Madeline turned to her mamma, who was standing by her, listening to the conversation, and, in an under voice, said, "Mamma, do you think I have the will?"

Mrs. Clifford's quiet answer, "I trust so, my child," might have appeared cold to some; but it was the smile, the look of contentment and hope which Madeline required, and which satisfied her.

Ruth was leaning back in her chair whilst this conversation was passing, seemingly engrossed in her own thoughts. Mr. Clifford sat down by her, and took up a book. Mrs. Clifford prepared the tea, and Madeline went to fetch her work for the evening. Still Ruth was silent; and when at length she was awakened from her fit of abstraction by Madeline's offering her some bread and butter, she did not tell what she had been thinking about. After the tea-things were removed, Mr. Clifford went to his study, and Ruth prepared as usual to read aloud. Perhaps she was sleepy—perhaps the book was not interesting. Certainly she did not seem to take much interest in it, and made many mistakes. Mrs. Clifford proposed music towards the close of the evening, and Ruth was sent to the study to know if her papa could come in.

"Not to-night, my dear," replied Mr. Clifford, as she delivered her message.

He did not raise his eyes from his writing. Ruth lingered in the doorway.

"Presently, papa—please do. It is much more pleasant to play when you are there."

"Oh! Ruth, is it you?" and Mr. Clifford looked up. "I fancied it was Madeline. No, I am afraid I cannot possibly come to night; I have not half finished my sermon."

"But there will be time to-morrow, dear papa. I wish you would."

Ruth advanced to enforce her petition by a kiss.

"It is a confirmation sermon, Ruth; I must not write it in a hurry."

"It is always the confirmation now," began Ruth; but she stopped and coloured.

"Would you have it any thing else, my dear child?"

"No, papa, of course not. I know it must be; but when it is over I think I shall be glad."

"And we may hope you will have reason to be so," answered Mr. Clifford, very gravely.

Ruth's reply was in an altered tone. "Papa, I wish I never thought of serious things lightly."

"Never speak of them lightly, my dear, that is the first step; and confirmation is of such great importance—a moment's thought upon the subject would always check you." Mr. Clifford took up his pen; but still Ruth did not offer to go.

"Papa," she said, after some hesitation, "do you really think I could be of any use to Alice?"

Mr. Clifford smiled, but it was not quite a smile of satisfaction. "I do not know, my dear. I would rather you should not think about it."

"I should like to do her good," continued Ruth; "Madeline believes I could."

Mr. Clifford pushed aside his writing as he replied, "My dear Ruth, we do good to others by doing good to ourselves. You, of all people, must remember this."

"Because I am proud," said Ruth, and the colour deepened on her cheek.

"Yes; because you are naturally proud, and have a great desire of influence and power. If this temptation is ever to be subdued, the struggle must begin at once."

"And I must not think about Alice, then?" said Ruth.

"Think about her in setting a good example, trying to make her happy, and giving her an interest in your pursuits; but leave the result. Alice is in far wiser hands than either yours or mine."

"I do not think I quite understand," said Ruth.

"It is the difference," replied Mr. Clifford, "between making it your chief business to induce her to do her duty, or to induce yourself to do your own. There are persons who are called upon to lead others

—clergymen, parents, masters and mistresses of families, and teachers. You are not placed in any such responsible situation. At your age there is but one thing to be attended to—your own heart.”

Ruth stood in silent thought for a few moments. At length she said, “It is so hard to know about one’s own heart. I do a great many bad things; but I cannot always feel sorry. Madeline is always sorry.”

“Madeline is blest with a tender conscience,” replied Mr. Clifford; “but she has her difficulties, as well as you, my dear Ruth. Still it is, I own, very sad to know that we ought to feel our sins, and yet not to do so.”

“I cannot make myself feel,” said Ruth.

“But you can pray, my dear child? Do you remember the collect for Ash Wednesday? It is particularly applicable to persons who desire to be penitent and yet are conscious that they are not so; and besides, you can practise yourself in self-examination; that is, not merely looking into your own heart, but into the law of God. The first step in the knowledge of what we are, is the sense of what we ought to be.”

“Perfect!” said Ruth, in a tone of much seriousness.

“Yes; perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

“But it is impossible to be so, now,” said Ruth.

“Impossible in actual practice; but not impossible in the will and endeavour.”

“Only, if we can never succeed,” continued Ruth, with some hesitation, “why should we attempt it?”

“I will answer your question by what is called analogy,” replied Mr. Clifford. “When a great artist sits down to draw, what is his object?”

“To do the best,” replied Ruth.

“Yes, the best possible, without imperfection; and

yet he is straining after that which he can never reach. So when a man devotes himself to science, his wish is to know all things connected with it. But the works of God are infinite: it is not in his nature to understand them; yet who blames him for trying to do so? It is only in religion, Ruth, that we are contented with anything short of perfection."

Ruth replied that she did not think she was contented.

"I suspect you are more so than you imagine," observed her father: "and, my love, since we are talking upon the subject, I would ask you, whenever you are inclined to dwell upon the hope of doing good to others, to end by thinking of how perfect you ought to be yourself."

"I do think about it very often," replied Ruth.

"Yet think about it still more; carry out the idea into details. Try, for instance, to understand in little minute particulars, what is involved in the two great duties, of love to God and love of your neighbour; all which tends to keep up a high standard of goodness is especially necessary for you, more peculiarly now, as a preparation for confirmation, when you are about to renew a sacred promise."

"I can never quite understand why it is right to promise so much," said Ruth, "since no one can perform it."

"When you are older, my love, and have thought more deeply, you will comprehend better that it would be inconsistent with the perfection of God to allow any promise to be made to Him that is not complete. But I think, even now, you will see that we act in the same way ourselves. A wife vows perfect obedience to her husband; a subject swears to be entirely loyal to his sovereign: no one says in these instances, 'I am not perfect, and I will only engage to keep a part of the vow;' but all right-

mind persons promise—that is, they own to having the will, and that will is accepted. If this is the case with our fellow-creatures, much more may we hope it will be with our Merciful God.”

“I think I have the will,” said Ruth.

“I trust you have, my dear ; yet I should be glad to know you had thought a good deal about it. We can only know ourselves by self-examination ; comparing our conduct with the requirements of God. When we see our duties, we see our faults. I wish you would spend some little time, as I said, in imagining what your every-day conduct would be,—how it would differ from what it is at present, if you were fully to perform those two duties, love to God and to your neighbour. I think it would be of use to you—of more use”—and Mr. Clifford smiled gravely—“than trying to do good to Alice.”

Ruth’s face was, for an instant, clouded. “I should like to do good to myself and Alice too,” she said.

“But, my love, trust me, till you have fulfilled the first task thoroughly, you will never be fit for the second.”

The truth of this assertion Ruth would not dispute, and she left the room.

CHAPTER VI.

SOME days afterwards Lady Catharine and Alice were breakfasting together at the Manor at eight o'clock. The room they occupied was that in which Alice, in bygone days, used to spend her pleasant Sundays. It was a south room, immediately under Alice's own apartment, and it had been retouched—it could scarcely be called re-furnished—within the last few months. Some old-fashioned chairs had been removed, and a cumbrous cabinet; and there was a new book-case occupying the lower end. Similar changes had taken place in many parts of the home—only in one respect there was no alteration. The closed rooms were still closed, and more carefully than before; they were never now unlocked except at stated periods. Alice saw, but she could not appreciate the changes made. There are some minds which instinctively cling to early attachments, and acquired habits, with a tenacity which makes it a positive pain to break from them even in trifles. Such was Lady Catharine Hyde's. The sight of every object in its accustomed place, the punctual recurrence of the same duties at the same hours, were necessary to her. It might not have been desirable that such things should be of importance; but the error, if it can be called such, had been increased, if not actually occasioned, by the circumstances in which she had been placed. Left in loneliness and great sorrow at an early period of life, Lady Catharine had been thrown back upon herself, her own resources, her own wishes. Excessive

precision and punctuality became a business to her. They gave her something to think of and to do ; they were motives for exertion ; and in themselves, when not carried to excess, (and there was no excess when she first began rigorously to practise them,) they were undoubtedly useful. It was natural that one, who moved so little in society, should learn to expect her will in such cases to be a law. Lady Catharine Hyde hardly knew what it was to be disobeyed, and she was never led to imagine by anything she saw or heard, that her peculiar habits and fancies could be burdensome to other persons. She believed that her mode of life was calculated, by its quietness and order, to render Alice good and happy ; and feeling herself surrounded by all that was needful for her own comfort, it was not easy to imagine what more a young girl could require. And yet Lady Catharine did think much, whether by any alteration she could give Alice pleasure. Although it did not suit her to ask the opinion of any other person upon the subject, she did the very best, according to her own judgment. The arrangement of Alice's room cost her much thought, and this was, in a measure, valued ; but the changes in other parts of the house, which to Lady Catharine were of much consequence, were almost unheeded by Alice. So it was in many ways : that which to Lady Catharine was a considerable effort, even an annoyance, was taken as a matter of course by Alice. Lady Catharine was peculiarly unselfish. Alice was bent upon her own gratification ; and yet, when Alice made her complaint to Madeline and Ruth, a stranger might have supposed that she was suffering under constant domestic tyranny, and this without any actual exaggeration of the facts.

"My dear," said Lady Catharine, on this morning, as Alice sat down to the breakfast-table, and began to pour some hot milk into the small deep cups or



oriental china, which Lady Catharine had never been prevailed upon to exchange for modern breakfast cups ; "you were rather after your time this morning ; did Marsham call you properly ?"

"The prayer bell had only just rung when I came down," replied Alice.

"I beg your pardon, my dear ; I waited at least seven minutes ; I reckoned by my watch :—don't let it happen again."

"No, ma'am."

"And, Alice, one thing I wanted to say to you particularly ; you manage to keep Barnes late with the letters—I saw him actually running to the Post Office yesterday."

Alice could not refrain from a smile as she thought of any one belonging to Lady Catharine's household committing the grave offence of running in the village.

"The post goes out earlier than it did," she replied.

"Yes ; but that ought to make no difference to you ; you ought to be ready in time, for you have the whole morning to yourself."

"I had several letters to write yesterday," continued Alice.

Lady Catharine looked annoyed.

"My dear, I wish you could learn to take reproof better ; it really seems as if you could never be in the wrong."

Alice was silent. Lady Catharine was beginning to notice her silence. She pondered upon it in her own mind, wondering what the cause could be, and then went on :

"What makes you write so many letters, my dear ?"

"They are to my schoolfellows," replied Alice.

"I promised I would write."

"To some, certainly you may."

Alice raised her head for an instant in surprise ; then began sipping her coffee quickly.

She had never realised the notion of Lady Catharine's interfering with her correspondence.

"We shall see, my dear," continued Lady Catharine in a voice which she meant to be peculiarly encouraging ; "perhaps I may not object : you shall show me some of their answers."

Alice grew rather uncomfortable. She had a most unpleasant recollection of a habit of Florence Trevelyan's of calling Lady Catharine "Juno."

"Is Miss Vernon one of your correspondents ?" inquired Lady Catharine. "I should have no objection to her."

"She is Ruth's friend," answered Alice ; "she has left school a long time."

"Oh, yes ; I remember now : but tell me, my dear—I really want to know—what are the names of your friends ?"

"I write to Jessie O'Neile sometimes," answered Alice, desirous to put forward the acquaintance which was the least likely to be found fault with.

"Miss O'Neile ; that is one. And whom besides ?"

"Last holidays I wrote to Fanny Wilson," continued Alice.

"Miss O'Neile and Miss Wilson. I have heard them mentioned. I can inquire about them through Mrs. Carter. Well ?"

"And sometimes—I have not written often—"

Lady Catharine's eye was fixed upon Alice, and the name was uttered hurriedly.

"Sometimes I write to Florence Trevelyan."

"Oh ! Trevelyan."

To Alice's surprise Lady Catharine's face quite brightened at the name.

"I know something of them—the Trevelyans, of Cromer Court. Mrs. Carter told me that two of the

daughters were with her. An aunt of theirs, Mrs. de Lacy, has lately come into this neighbourhood. I am sorry you are not more intimate."

Alice was upon the point of saying that she was very intimate, but she could not openly and at once contradict herself.

"I will inquire about the others you named," pursued Lady Catharine, with unusual animation. "I shall like you to have friends of your own age; and if these young ladies are desirable companions, you can ask them to come and stay with you by and by."

"Thank you, ma'am," replied Alice, coldly. She did not feel ungrateful, but she was provoked with herself. If she had only spoken out boldly, Florence Trevelyan might have been invited almost immediately.

Lady Catharine had made what for her was a great advance towards sympathy, and was vexed at Alice's apparent shyness. Still she made another attempt to overcome it.

"You can tell me, I dare say, my dear, what Miss O'Neile and Miss Wilson are like. What age are they?"

Alice told, and made a few general observations on their appearance and dispositions.

"Miss Trevelyan must be older, I imagine, from what Mrs. Carter said," observed Lady Catharine.

Alice answered, that Florence was nearly seventeen.

"And she has a sister?"

"Yes, ma'am, one."

The answer was short, for Alice particularly disliked talking about Florence Trevelyan just then.

"Ah! then, I suppose that is the reason you did not get on with her as well as with the others; she must have been too old."

Alice was becoming vexed at what she felt to be

her own disagreeable manner. It was unusual for Lady Catharine to ask so many questions, and under other circumstances Alice would have been softened, by the interest shewn, into being communicative. Now she could only think how stupid she had been herself in not saying that Florence Trevelyan was her friend; and how provoking it was in Lady Catharine so to interpret her few words as to decide that they were not of an age to suit each other.

"Well! if Miss Trevelyan should come into the neighbourhood to visit her aunt, I shall hope to become acquainted with her," continued Lady Catharine.

Alice said, with an air of indifference, she hoped that Florence would come; and then the conversation was stopped, for the butler came in with the letters. Three were laid before Lady Catharine, one before Alice; Lady Catharine was immediately engrossed in her correspondence, and Alice opened a letter from Florence Trevelyan with some degree of trepidation as to the style of its contents.


But there was not any great reason to be uncomfortable. Florence Trevelyan had not remained so long under Mrs. Carter's care without deriving benefit.

She was, as Alice had said, improved; her very moderate abilities had been made the most of; and her manners and habits refined. When with sensible judicious companions, she could be apparently sensible and judicious too; or at least not remarkably the reverse. She was what is called very passable in society; lady-like and tolerably accomplished; with sufficient information to enable her to enter upon the ordinary topics of the day without committing any great blunders.

On more important points she was altered much

in the same degree. Increasing age had given her increasing steadiness; her position in the school, which naturally was raised as time passed on, made her more watchful over others, and more guarded in her own conduct. Though she often talked foolishly, and loved dress, and gave way to vanity, it was in a quiet way which people in general were not likely to remark; and which even Mrs. Carter sometimes failed to discover. Florence Trevelyan, when she left school, was like hundreds of her age and sex who have received the ordinary advantages of education. The usual remark made upon her was that she was a nice lady-like girl, and more agreeable than Harriet, whose temper was not so good, and whose manners were not so lively. Her letter was a transcript of her mind; smooth and well-sounding, with nothing in it; the hand-writing pointed and delicate enough to pass current as a lady's, but not giving any indication of character.

The first part of the letter was written from her home. It mentioned the weather and the state of the roads, her mamma's health and the arrival of her brothers from school. Also the fact that she had received a present from an uncle, and had been invited to a young party. The postscript, written on a loose half sheet, was, however, dated differently. It was from Sheldon, a village about three miles from Laneton. Florence was staying there with her aunt. She wrote in great delight, and with most warm expressions. The near vicinity to Laneton had brought out all her real or supposed affection for Alice. It was now, "My dearest Alice;" nothing could be more charming than the prospect of their meeting; Mrs. de Lacy was enchanted also. They would be together constantly. In fact, the chief object of Florence's visit to the neighbourhood was, she said, the prospect of seeing her "darling Alice."



At the conclusion, Alice was reminded that she had not kept to her promise of writing every week ; and it was hinted, in terms of gentle reproach, that she seemed likely to be the first to break the vow they had made of lasting friendship.

The letter was a very fair letter ; there was really nothing objectionable in it : no mention of "Juno : " but it perplexed Alice extremely. The idea of lasting friendship and correspondence every week was not at all compatible with her profession of writing but seldom, and her air of indifference ; and they were just the points which Lady Catharine was likely to notice.

"Well ! my dear !" said Lady Catharine, laying down her letter, and looking at Alice as if expecting to receive something. Alice held Florence's letter under the table. "You have heard from some one, surely, my dear ?"

"Yes, ma'am." Alice hesitated ; then, what she considered a bright thought—alas ! should we not rather call all thoughts but those of simple truth most dark and evil ones—struck her. She placed the letter before Lady Catherine, and crushing the postscript together, managed to put it into her pocket.

"A very tolerable letter this," said Lady Catharine, as she finished reading it. "Very fairly expressed ; neatly written ; not much in it, certainly ; but still, as you are only commonly intimate, I suppose there is not much to be said. I dare say you will be in no great hurry to answer it. Young ladies seldom care to give up much of their time except to their particular friends. Which do you like best, Alice ; Miss Wilson or Miss O'Neile ?"

Alice did not know ; she was equally indifferent to both.

"Put the letter by carefully," continued Lady

Catharine. "You should have a place in your desk for answered and unanswered letters. Or, stay, I will give you a little case for them, marked. You will like that, my dear?"

There was sometimes a tone in Lady Catharine's "my dear," which touched Alice deeply. It spoke of such real kindness, such hearty interest;—it was one of the few signs of her deep affection which almost unknowingly escaped her. Now it sounded in Alice's ear as a reproach for a slight deception, the result of a want of moral courage; for words true in the letter, but not in the spirit. Alice had not written often to Florence; but she had promised that she would do so. She said, "Thank you," for Lady Catharine's offer of a case for her letters, but it was not hearty gratitude, and Lady Catharine was once more chilled. A last attempt was made for conversation. Lady Catharine mentioned the confirmation. She spoke of it very seriously, and with considerable tenderness towards Alice. She did not indeed inquire whether Alice was desirous of being confirmed; that was taken as a matter of course: but she expressed most warm interest in her welfare, and begged that if difficulties should arise in her mind, they might be brought before her without reserve. Then she said, "You are very silent, my love; have you any objection to being confirmed?"

Poor Alice! she would have suffered severe bodily pain to avoid answering that question; for how much was involved in it!

Confirmation was a very important rite, Lady Catharine had said. Yes; Alice well knew that. She knew the awfulness of her baptismal vows; she knew the trial implied in the solemn engagements to renounce the works of the devil and the vanities of the world; to believe the articles of the Christian faith, and to keep the commandments of God through the

course, of—it might be—a long life. Alice was not ignorant of her responsibilities. She understood them too well for her own peace of mind ; for conscience whispered, in answer to Lady Catharine's question, that she was not willing to undertake them ; that she would fain live a little longer to the world and to herself ; that she would indulge her vanity, and follow the bent of her own self-will for a little while, and then—but Alice did not think deliberately of the future. She took it for granted that she should be good some day or other, in some way or other. She supposed that religion would come to her by and by, as a matter of course. Lady Catharine was religious, so was Mrs. Carter, so were Mr. and Mrs. Clifford. Their right principles seemed to be always at hand, and Alice could not see why at last it should not be the same with her. To be religious without effort was her desire. Confirmation implied an effort—a resolution. Alice was no hypocrite. She did not desire to make the effort, therefore she did not desire to be confirmed. Yet, in answer to Lady Catharine's inquiry, she said, that she had no objection.

CHAPTER VII.

"You must wish mamma many happy returns of the day, Alice: it is her birthday."

This was Madeline's first speech to Alice on the thirtieth of June. They were to spend the day together at the Parsonage. Alice's countenance was a great contrast to Madeline's on this morning. Madeline was the picture of light-heartedness; Alice was evidently discomposed. She returned Madeline's greeting, and inquired for Ruth.

"Oh, Ruth is with papa at the school, arranging the books. It is a holiday, and so they are very busy putting every thing in order."

"I should have thought Ruth would have had a holiday too, on her mamma's birthday," remarked Alice.

"It is a holiday, in fact, for her; she likes being at the school very much, for she is always glad to help papa; and I have been with mamma in the store-room. Ruth thought she should be back by the time you came."

"I imagined I should have found her here," said Alice, in a tone of vexation.

Madeline could not help perceiving Alice's manner, and began to think it would have been better for her to have remained at the Manor, if she was not inclined to be pleased. She proposed that Alice should go up-stairs to take off her bonnet, and Alice agreed, though still in the same moody way. Madeline went to speak to her mamma, and during her absence Alice occupied herself in looking at the

books that were on the table. They were a Bible and Prayer Book ; one or two upon confirmation and the Holy Communion, and others of a serious kind. A school register also was there, and with it were some little books for school rewards. Alice took them up and put them down with an air of disgust. Then she sighed, and returned to them again. They excited apparently disagreeable thoughts, yet still they engaged her attention.

It was some little time before Madeline came back, and when she did it was only to make an apology, and beg Alice to go down-stairs into the school-room alone for a few minutes. She would be with her as soon as possible, but she wished to do something for her mamma first.

Alice did not attend to Madeline's request ; and, as soon as the door closed, she sat down and recommenced her examination of the book. One was a volume of sacred poetry ; the names of both Ruth and Madeline were written in it, and it was full of pencil marks. Alice saw that it was much read, and therefore she supposed much liked ; but why it should be was a mystery to her. It was not what she called pretty poetry ; the lines did not all flow easily, they did not catch the ear at the first sound ; and there was some difficulty in reaching the meaning. Alice read over some verses several times before she could entirely understand them. Still, the book interested her. She liked to guess why the marked passages were preferred ; to try and find out which were Ruth's favourites, and which Madeline's. Insensibly she began to apply some to herself, if not as the expression of her own feelings, at least as saying what she would wish to feel ; and whilst she did this, she forgot her own cares, her self-will, and vanity, and discontent, and dwelt, as it were, in another and a better world.

And Alice knew that better world to be also the true world. When she read of Heaven and eternity, angels and saints, and of Him, the Lord of all, who had redeemed her, she knew that she was reading of realities which must endure for ever. A quieter, more solemn feeling stole over her; bitterness was mixed with it, but she did not strive, as before, to escape from it. Minutes went by quickly, and at length Alice was roused from her occupation by the voice of Ruth, who said, as she peeped over her shoulder,

"I am glad you are looking at that,—don't you like it excessively?"

Alice closed the volume instantly. "How long you have been, Ruth! I have been waiting here such a time!"

"It was rather naughty of me," said Ruth, playfully; "but I could not help it; papa and I were so busy. And you know I could not make a stranger of you."

"But where is Madeline?"

"She went away to your mamma."

"And left you here alone? Really she ought not to have done that, I quite depended on her taking care of you."

"Madeline did what she could," replied Alice, "and she begged me to go down stairs; only I preferred staying here."

"There is not much to amuse you here," said Ruth, looking round the room. "You are not very fond of grave books, Alice."

"Yes, I am, sometimes,—some books.—I like this one," she added, with a slight hesitation, pointing to the small volume which she had been reading.

Ruth took up the book, and turned over the pages, "Yes," she said, thoughtfully, "if one were only as good as this would make one! I wish,—"

But Alice interrupted her with a question : " What are we going to do to-day, Ruth ? "

Ruth looked a little startled at her abruptness, but mentioned several plans ; amongst them, a walk to a neighbouring village, to see a new church which was building there ; or, if they chose, to call on a friend who lived at a distance beyond, and to take the pony with them, and ride in turn. Alice did not seem to take a particular interest in any suggestion, but Ruth went on planning most good-naturedly. Presently, Alice said,

" That church at Redford is not far from Mrs. De Lacy's, is it ? "

" No," replied Ruth ; " but what makes you ask ? "

" Mrs. De Lacy is Florence Trevelyan's aunt," said Alice.

" Is she indeed ? I never heard so before. "

" She is her aunt," repeated Alice ; " and," she added, after an instant's pause, " Florence is coming ; she is come—perhaps she may be there. "

" I should rather like to see her again," observed Ruth, carelessly. " Did you say she was come, or coming ? "

" Coming ;—come, I think ;—yes, I believe she is there," replied Alice.

" And I suppose you will ask Lady Catharine to take you over to see her," said Ruth, " since you are such great allies. "

" Oh, Ruth ! " Alice stopped and coloured.

" Oh, Ruth ! what ? " repeated Ruth, laughing ; then, seeing that Alice appeared really uncomfortable, she added, " is there any harm in saying you are great allies ? "

" I would rather you should not say so before Lady Catharine," answered Alice, more boldly.

" What ? she will think ' allies ' not quite a young lady's word. "

"No ; nonsense, she is not so particular as that ; but, Ruth, I am afraid to say things to you, I am afraid you will not understand them."

Ruth drew up her head. "Certainly, if you think that, Alice, you had better keep your secrets to yourself." She turned aside and said no more.

Alice regarded her attentively without appearing irritated. On the contrary, there was an expression of interest and respect in her face. Ruth went to the dressing-table, and taking off her bonnet, began to arrange her hair. Madeline at this moment came in to fetch a little parcel of work for a poor woman, and going up to Ruth put her arm affectionately round her and said : "Are you tired, dear ? can I help you ?" It was a very natural, simple question, but it was put so tenderly and unselfishly, that it struck Alice peculiarly. And Ruth's manner in return—the confidence, the sense of hearty sympathy, made her feel as she often did now, envious. She sighed when Madeline left the room, and said : "I wish I had a sister."

"Every one may well wish that who has not one," answered Ruth ; but the words were regretted as soon as they were uttered ; for Alice's face grew sad. "I mean a sister is a great blessing," continued Ruth ; "but other people have friends, and that does for them, I suppose."

"Some persons have friends," observed Alice ; "not all."

"You have a friend," continued Ruth,— "Florence Trevelyan."

"No, indeed ; a friend !—she is not a friend—she is not what I mean. I like her, but she is not my friend."

"I thought you were great allies," answered Ruth, with a slight accent of contempt, which did not reach Alice's ears.

"Allies are not friends," answered Alice.

Ruth turned round quickly, and her face showed both pleasure and astonishment.

"Then you have notions of something good in a friend, Alice," she said.

"Good? yes, very good indeed! a great, great deal better than myself; but no one who is good will ever be my friend."

Alice's manner when she said this excited Ruth's compassion, and overcame her prudence.

"I wish you had a friend at the Manor," she replied, "in Lady Catharine."

Alice twisted her chain according to her old school trick, and did not instantly answer. Presently she broke forth with: "It is enough to make any one angry, to be treated so—just like a child!—ordered about—lectured from morning till night."

Ruth could scarcely refrain from a smile at this incoherent indignation.

"But what is the matter?—what is it all?" she inquired.

"The old story; but I can't bear it—I won't—she does not care for me in the least."

"Alice, you are wrong there," replied Ruth, gravely; "though you are vexed, you ought not to be unjust."

"I have been lectured this morning like a baby," continued Alice. "She says that I waste my time, and that I must, whether I like it or not, go to the school; and I am to take a list of my books, and an inventory of all my things, and I don't know what. It is ten times worse than school; there one expected it, but this is home."

"But, Alice," said Ruth, persuasively, "just think for one minute, there is nothing very dreadful in having to go to the school, or to take a list of books, Papa and mamma make us do so."

"Do they?" answered Alice, more calmly; "but you are different from me—you don't dislike it."

"Madeline does," said Ruth: "she hears a little class every Thursday morning, who can only just tell their letters; but she never complains, though she dislikes it extremely."

"Madeline is good," said Alice; "I never shall be."

A sigh followed this speech. Ruth was interested by it. Alice's state of mind appeared strange to her.

"Madeline is good," she replied; "but I don't see why you are not to be equally so."

"Because it is not in my nature—that is all."

"It is not in Madeline's nature to do disagreeable things," said Ruth.

"But then she has you with her," pursued Alice. "I could be good too, if I had you."

A tear stood in her eye as she spoke. Ruth's heart was softened, and she gave Alice a kiss. The pent-up spirit, which had before only partially shown itself broke forth instantly. Alice burst into a renewed declaration of disappointment and discontent at her home; longings to be like Madeline and Ruth; regrets, fervent and sincere, for her own faults; and, at length, a half expressed, yet earnest assurance, that if she had but a friend like Ruth, all would be well. She required, she was aware, some one to guide and interest her.

Ruth listened, sympathisingly; and—shall it be owned—with satisfaction. "All would be well if Alice had a friend like her." Ruth had no fear then of being insincere, of not respecting Alice. Another idea presented itself—influence. Her manner altered, and became more gentle and free. She spoke soothingly, yet firmly; she reminded Alice of her duties. It was pleasant to watch the gradual change which her words produced. Alice grew less vehement,

more humble and affectionate. Ruth felt her own power, and her heart swelled within her. She spoke yet more strongly of submission and lowliness; she even ventured at last to remind Alice of her approaching confirmation and the responsibility she must take upon herself. She said that it was necessary to make good resolutions, and recommended one even at that moment. It was, that Alice should try to please Lady Catharine by agreeing to attend the school; and when Alice consented after some hesitation, Ruth was quite satisfied with her morning's work.

"Mamma advises us to go out immediately," said Madeline, interrupting the conversation a second time, "and she says—" Alice's tearful eyes, and Ruth's heightened colour, made her pause for an instant; but the tact of a simple, unselfish mind suggested to her that it might be better not to ask questions, and she went on: "Mamma says that we can take some biscuits with us, or we can have a sandwich before we set off, but we had better not wait for regular luncheon, for fear of not being back in time for dinner."

"And where are we to go?" asked Ruth.

"Oh! any way we choose, and we may have the pony if we like it."

"I should like Redford," said Alice, in rather a low voice, to Ruth. Ruth appeared not to hear.

"Can't we go?" continued Alice.

"Go! where?—to Redford? Yes, I suppose we can if we choose it."

"You were wishing to go there, Ruth, only yesterday," said Madeline.

Ruth still did not give a hearty assent; and as Madeline went to the further end of the room she said to Alice, with a slight air of annoyance:

"You would go to Redford, because you think you may meet Florence Trevelyan."

"I don't know that I shall meet her," answered Alice.

"But you think it probable; and she will not be of any use to you, Alice, if you want good friends."

"There is no harm in wishing to see her," observed Alice; "and I can't say I think it kind in you to stand in the way. But, in fact, I am not at all certain of meeting her. I scarcely think it probable that I shall; but I should like to go to Redford, because every one talks about the church, and Lady Catharine will be glad for me to go."

Ruth felt that she had tried to exert her newly acquired influence over Alice rather too strongly. She said no more, but entered into the plan cheerfully; pleasing herself with the hope of having made another little step towards gaining Alice's confidence and regard.

The restoration of Redford Church was a common subject of conversation in the neighbourhood. Ruth and Madeline had seen the plans, and heard them explained, and learnt some of the principal terms of architecture connected with them; but Mr. Clifford, in talking upon the subject, had impressed them with a much greater idea of the importance of the spirit with which such works should be undertaken, than of the value of a knowledge of the details.

Madeline's thoughts, as she approached Redford Church, were less of painted windows and oak carvings than of the sacredness of a place which was to be set apart for the worship of God, and which, it was therefore right, should be made as beautiful as possible.

Ruth's were a little different. She remembered it was a church which they were to see; and that her papa had told her he would rather she should not talk about it lightly to every one; but she was pleased to think that Alice was ignorant of the terms

applied to the different parts, and felt a glow of satisfaction as she pointed out the tracery of the east window, and observed that it was taken from some old cathedral.

To Alice, Redford Church was like any other sight; very pretty, tolerably interesting, a good object for a long walk, and something to converse upon afterwards. The question that principally occupied her mind as they drew near to it was whether or not they should meet Florence Trevelyan.

Ruth understood what was passing in Alice's mind by the quick way in which she turned to look at any one who went by, and her careful notice of all the houses on the road. The idea that Alice was thinking of Florence gave her a feeling of rivalry, and she exerted herself more to be agreeable; and at last succeeded in winning Alice's attention completely, by rather an amusing account of a pic-nic party that had taken place a short time previously, and which she had heard described by a morning visitor. Ruth was not quite clear that the story was a desirable one to repeat, she had heard her mamma say it was rather ill-natured; but it was to entertain Alice and prevent her from caring for Florence Trevelyan, and make her fond of being with them; and, without conceit, it was quite clear to Ruth's mind that Alice was more likely to learn good from them than from Florence.

Ruth purposely, though insensibly to Alice, gave the conversation a graver turn as they drew near the church, and when they entered it her manner became very serious. It was not natural, indeed, for one in whom the spirit of reverence had been so carefully cultivated, to feel anything but quiet awe in a building soon to be consecrated to God. Ruth looked at the font, which had been recently placed at the western entrance of the church, and it brought to her re-

membrance her baptismal vows, and the engagement which she must before long renew in the face of the assembled congregation. Her eye passed along the open seats, and it required but little imagination to picture them filled with rich and poor met together for one common purpose, acknowledging the sins of the same sinful nature, and asking the pardon of the same God, through the Saviour who had died alike for all. Whilst holier, more solemn still—beyond, in the depth of the chancel, stood the altar, reminding her that, if her life were spared, she might, before many months were over, be permitted to kneel and receive the completion of her Christian privileges, the foretaste of the communion of heaven.

No! a church, even when unconsecrated, is not a place for a careless discussion of the beauties of architecture, and the display of our knowledge of corbels, and finials, and carvings, and the difference between modern and ancient glass. Unless we speak of these things with a full remembrance that they are connected with a sacred building we had much better be silent.

Alice was easily influenced by example. She soon caught the tone of her companion's observations, and walked up the aisles quietly, making her remarks without any appearance of levity. Ruth noticed this, and flattered herself that it was partly the result of being with her. Alice was not naturally so subdued and reverent.

They were standing before the altar, and Ruth was remarking some peculiarities in the ornaments about it, when another party entered the church. Ruth was too much occupied with what she was saying to observe them, and both Alice and Madeline were listening to her attentively. The strangers were an elderly lady, a little girl of about eleven, and a young lady rather pretty, very well dressed, and slightly

self-conscious in manner. They advanced into the chancel. Ruth, not aware of their presence, continued her observations in a tone loud enough to be audible.

The young lady watched them for a few instants, then smiled and whispered something to her friend, and stepping forward gently touched Alice's shoulder.

"Florence!" exclaimed Alice, recovering from her first feeling of frightened displeasure.

Florence laughed heartily, and held out her hand to Ruth and Madeline.

She was in ecstasies at the meeting; it was delightful, charming; nothing in the world could be more fortunate; and her aunt would be so rejoiced to see them; where had they come from? how long had they been there? when were they obliged to go back?

Madeline stood in silent wonder; abashed at the height and fashionable appearance of her former school-fellow.

Ruth was quite self-possessed.

"A charming church this is!" began Florence, putting up her eye-glass.

Ruth assented shortly.

"My aunt has been promising to bring me here ever since I arrived," continued Florence; "you must be introduced to my aunt—my Aunt Harriet—Harriet, my sister, was named after her."

Mrs. De Lacy drew near, and Alice and her companions were introduced. She was a middle-aged, indolent-mannered, soft-voiced person, with a slight lisp. Ruth was not at all struck by her. Rather an awkward pause followed the introduction, and Mrs. De Lacy, for want of something to say, observed that Ruth must have a considerable knowledge of architecture from the remarks she had been making.

"Oh! Ruth knows everything," exclaimed Florence; "she always did at school."

"Not quite everything, Florence," replied Ruth. "Papa has taught me the terms of architecture, that is all I know."

"And a great deal more than I do, or my aunt either," exclaimed Florence. "Aunt Harriet, we must make Ruth go round the church with us and do the honours."

Ruth declined the proposal, again insisting upon her own ignorance.

"Well, then, Madeline, you had always a little wisdom in your head, tell us all about the church."

Madeline seemed quite amused at the idea of possessing any wisdom; but without hesitation told what she knew of the style, and the points which were particularly to be admired. Florence listened carelessly, and presently, putting her arm within that of Alice, drew her to the lower end of the church. Mrs. De Lacy remained talking to Ruth and Madeline, and invited them both to return with her to her house, which was about half a mile distant. Ruth hesitated, and Mrs. De Lacy pressed her with some earnestness. She was very glad, she said, to make their acquaintance. She had often heard her niece speak of them, and it would be a great advantage to Florence to have such agreeable, sensible companions whilst she was in the neighbourhood. Ruth's thanks were quietly given, but her hesitation was evidently less.

"Had we not better go home, Ruth?" said Madeline. "We shall be late for dinner."

"Oh! but surely just for this once. Your mamma is not very exacting, I am sure," continued Mrs. De Lacy.

Madeline blushed deeply, and approaching her sister more nearly, whispered hurriedly, "Mamma does not know Mrs. De Lacy."

"Come, I see you are inclined to yield," persisted

Mrs. De Lacy. "I shall hope to make your mamma's personal acquaintance before long, and then I shall be able to explain the case to her. Really I cannot resist the opportunity of cultivating such a very desirable acquaintance."

"We might walk part of the way together," said Ruth.

"Yes ; we might," observed Madeline, great doubt being expressed in the word "might."

"Well, come part of the way, and I shall see whether I cannot persuade you to extend your walk the whole way," said Mrs. De Lacy, and she went forward to tell Florence that she had gained her point.

Alice was giving her whole attention to something which Florence was telling her, and she was very glad not to be immediately interrupted. She thanked Ruth cordially for consenting, and said it was very kind in her, and then she and Florence left the church together. They soon however rejoined Ruth ; and Florence began thanking her again for going with them, declaring that it would have been a great disappointment if she had not done so ; for they might not have another opportunity of seeing each other for some time.

"I wish, extremely, to hear all about the Parsonage," she continued, "what you do—how you spend your time. I heard such an account of you from a lady who dined at my aunt's the day before yesterday ; and you know, Ruth, you were always a pattern to every one."

Ruth's colour changed quickly, and she was silent. Florence went on talking to Alice. Mrs. De Lacy, Madeline, and the two children were behind. What passed between Florence and Alice for the next few minutes Ruth did not very well know. That short allusion to bygone days had carried her mind back to

school ; its great temptations and her own weakness. Was she altered ? Had the lapse of time, with the blessing of good advice, and good example, strengthened her moral principles ? Having reached an age when she could no longer be deemed a child, and about to be admitted to confirmation and the vast privilege succeeding it, was she really bent upon giving up all which might withdraw her heart from God ? These are questions which we may ask at length ; by Ruth they were only felt as a misgiving, a pang of conscience, a doubt whether the Ruth Clifford of the quiet country parsonage was not in too many respects the same Ruth Clifford of Mrs. Carter's school, who had so sadly wandered from the straight-forward path of duty.

"Now, Ruth, we must turn this way," said Madeline, trying to gain her sister's attention, as they came to a place where four lanes met. "It will lead us across the common into the Laneton road."

Ruth was a short distance before, now again conversing upon a subject which apparently interested all parties—the home life at the Parsonage. She did not hear her sister and went on.

"Must they not lead happy lives ?" said Alice ; as Ruth paused in her description. "Much happier than mine."

"Or mine !" remarked Florence, sighing. "I only wish I could do just the same."

"Oh ! no, Florence ; you like gaieties, and going out to dinner parties and balls," said Ruth. "Alice has told me you are to begin soon ; you would not bear our sober ways."

"Florence would, though," said Alice.

"Certainly I should. It was only the other day we settled how we should like to live together in a village ; did we not, Alice ? We would have a few friends to see us, now and then, and go out for a

walk when we chose, and have a nice little pony chaise."

"And go to the schools, and see the poor people," added Alice.

"Oh yes, of course do everything of that kind ; live a complete country life, in short."

Just then Madeline gained Ruth's attention by saying rather more loudly, "Ruth, we have passed the turning ; I don't think we must go any further."

"And there is Sheldon Lodge," said Mrs. De Lacy, pointing to a white house just seen amongst the trees.

"It will not make five minutes' difference to go on," observed Alice.

"And I do so want to talk a little more," said Florence.

Ruth answered, that she was afraid they must wait for another opportunity ; but she did not wish any one "good bye." She stood looking at the lodge.

"Mamma would rather not, I am sure," said Madeline, going up to her.

Mrs. De Lacy did not hear what she said, but laughingly exclaimed, "I suspect you are a little enemy. Suppose we make a compromise ; you shall walk with us to the gate."

"There can be no harm in that, Madeline," said Ruth, and Madeline could not exactly say there was ; only in her heart she wished it had been settled otherwise.

The gate was soon reached ; there they were really to separate ; but by this time a new cause had arisen for delay. Alice wanted Ruth to see a prize which Florence had gained the last half year she was at school ; actually a good-conduct prize. It was a very handsome book, "One of the handsomest," she said, "which had ever been given by Mrs. Carter ;" and when Alice made this remark, she

watched Ruth, as she had done once or twice before, to see the effect of her words. Ruth's manner to Florence had been gradually changing during the whole of this interview. At first she was rather cold; then cheerful, but indifferent; then interested; and now, there was clearly a certain mixture of respect. She did not like to give Florence any trouble, she said, and as they were in a hurry, perhaps it would be better to wait till another day. Florence would not be contented with this proposal. She wished to have Ruth's opinion about the book at once, because she was such a good judge.

"We might just go in for one minute," said Alice.

Ruth really could see no objection, as they had come so far; and referring to Madeline, asked her whether she would not come also. Madeline looked a little surprised and annoyed, and reminded her that it was getting late.

"We shall not be one minute—not half a minute," exclaimed Florence, hastening towards the house, and Ruth and Alice followed her.

Madeline remained behind, making a laughing excuse to Mrs. De Lacy that she wished to be a check upon the others: they would be ashamed to keep her waiting, and if they all went together, they might be tempted to stay for another hour.

Ruth was fully resolved only to be absent the "one minute." She walked very fast, saying several times that they had not an instant to spare; and declining Mrs. De Lacy's invitation to go into the drawing-room, went up stairs directly to Florence's apartment. Alice began to remark upon its prettiness, the pattern of the chintz furniture, the luxury of having a sofa, the convenience of the large wardrobe, and other such advantages; but Ruth was not to be diverted from her one object. She made Florence bring her the

book immediately. It was Bishop Taylor's "Holy Living and Dying." Florence said she had read some of it and liked it. Ruth knew it well, but she would not talk about it then; and, after admiring it extremely, she said, they must manage to meet again soon; and, summoning Alice, led the way down stairs. Alice lingered a little behind, and Ruth and Florence stood at the head of the stairs waiting for her. The staircase was a winding one, and from it they could look down into a stone hall, from which the doors of the different rooms opened. They heard Mrs. De Lacy speaking to some one below. Florence listened and drew back instantly.

"How provoking!" she exclaimed. "Wait one minute; don't go down just now." Ruth's foot was on the first stair.

"Indeed we must go. No one will take any notice of us," she replied, impatiently.

Florence forcibly detained her, and when Alice joined them she put up her finger to enforce silence.

"We did not expect you till this evening," they heard Mrs. De Lacy say.

Florence loosened her hold of Ruth.

"Now we are safe. I hate encountering visitors."

Ruth ran down the stairs. The drawing-room door was left open. They could see Mrs. De Lacy placing a chair for a young lady. Ruth did not remark her particularly. Florence, as her back was towards them, stepped before her, and took the handle of the door to shut it; but before she had succeeded, Ruth caught the voice and foreign accent of the stranger. She could not mistake it, though so long a time had elapsed since she had heard it.

"Justine Le Vergnier!" she exclaimed.

Florence coloured crimson. She motioned to Ruth and Alice to enter a small study next the drawing-room, and closing the door, said:

"I did not wish you to know,—at least not you, Ruth. I told Alice she was expected. But you must please promise me not to say you have seen her, even to Madeline; and if you hear anything about her, not to make any allusion to old times, Mrs. Carter, and all that nonsense. It would be immensely unkind, and do great mischief."

"I never feel myself bound to keep secrets unless I know a reason for it," said Ruth, with some pride of manner. "Why is Justine here?"

"It is a long story; there is not time to tell it now," said Florence.

"But I do not like to have secrets from mamma," observed Ruth; "and Alice ought not to have any from Lady Catharine."

"Trust Alice for that," said Florence, laughing. "Juno is not like Mrs. Clifford. But, my dear Ruth, I thought I could trust you entirely; and I may want to consult you. You may really be of use to me, if you will only be wise just now; but I assure you you do not know the mischief you may do if you are not."

Florence was not clever; it was a sort of instinct which made her seize on Ruth's weak point. To be of use, to give advice, to have influence in fact, was a tempting bait to a person of Ruth's character.

"All I wish," continued Florence, "is, as I said before, that you should not mention having seen Justine here; and, if anything is said about her, that you should not refer in any way to the old story against her."

Ruth could see no exact harm in the promise, yet she did not like promises. Alice declared her full belief that they were bound in honour not to say one word more than Florence desired. It would be cruel to rake up old offences. Ruth felt that good-nature was expected of her, whether true or false was not

the question. She hesitated. Florence again professed an intention of some day asking her opinion; and Alice said she was certain that Ruth would judge properly. It did seem unkind of Ruth to refuse, when she could not tell the reasons which might induce Florence to make the request; and if they were to differ now it might produce a coldness, which might never be overcome. This would be a pity, as Florence appeared improved and open to good impressions. So, after some little consideration, Ruth agreed to say nothing for the present—"only for the present, however," she repeated, as they left the house.

CHAPTER VIII.

"WHERE are you going, my dear Alice?" said Lady Catharine, a few mornings after the visit to Redford Church, as she met Alice dressed for walking, soon after breakfast.

"To the school, ma'am; it is my day."

"To the school, my dear, alone? Why did you not tell me?"

"I thought you wished me to go, ma'am," answered Alice.

"Certainly, my dear, I wished it. But this—really—I don't understand—you take me quite by surprise. Who told you to go this morning?"

"Mr. Clifford told me this would be the best day when I went to the Parsonage yesterday," answered Alice.

"But to go without my knowledge! Very extraordinary! Come back, my dear, into the breakfast-room. Let me hear more about it—very extraordinary indeed!"

Lady Catharine entered the breakfast-room with a stately step, and seated herself in a high-backed chair, against which, however, she would on no account have leant.

"Now, my dear, let me hear something more: who do you say told you to go to the school?"

"You did, ma'am, and Mr. Clifford."

"We talked to you about it; but you were not inclined to undertake the duty, for a duty it clearly is. I should be glad, my dear, for the future, to understand you better."

"I thought you would be pleased when I came back," said Alice, with more humility than she had hitherto shown.

"Perhaps I might have been. I will not say that I should not; but I ought to have been told before. I like to be prepared. I cannot understand what your arrangements for the day are to be."

Alice had made no arrangements. Ruth had been talking to her again about the school. Mr. Clifford had named the day and the hour when it would be best for her to attend. She had half made up her mind the night before that she would go, and determined upon it decidedly that morning, as much because she was not in a humour for her ordinary occupations, as from a principle of duty.

"Well!" continued Lady Catharine, recovering her usual dignity, and pitying Alice's discomposure—"I dare say you did not intend any harm, my dear; but you must remember I do not like surprises. If I had been prepared for this step I should have formed different plans myself."

"The step" seemed to Alice a very simple one, and instead of making apologies or excuses she asked if there was any reason now why she should not go.

"None at all, my dear—none that I know of; it is quite right, your duty, to attend at the school. I hope you will pay particular attention to Mr. Clifford's instructions as to what you are to do. Still I could have desired—however, it cannot be helped, it is out of the question you should be with me, when you have arranged to take a morning at the school."

"Are you going out, ma'am?" asked Alice, rather astonished.

"Only for some visits, my dear, at a distance; and I shall take Mrs. De Lacy of Sheldon on my way back. I thought, as you informed me the other day, that you had met your schoolfellow, Miss Trevelyan

at Redford, you might have liked to accompany me ; but it does not signify ; and as Miss Trevelyan is not a particular friend of yours, you will not so much care." Alice was silent from vexation. "I will not keep you, my dear," continued Lady Catharine ; no doubt as Mr. Clifford named the hour, he will be punctual and ready to tell you what you have to do. I shall be glad to hear when I return. You have no message, I conclude, for Miss Trevelyan ?"

Alice had a message, which she wished very much to send. It was to repeat to Florence a caution she had hastily given her at their first meeting—not to say much about their being intimate ; but as this could not be sent through Lady Catharine, she could only reply in the negative, and Lady Catharine begging her to make a proper apology to Mr. Clifford if she should be late at the school, dismissed her.

Left to herself, Lady Catharine's manner changed. The severe features relaxed ; the coldness of the grey eye was softened into melancholy, and the stern lips expressed tenderness and anxiety.

When would Alice cease to be reserved with her best friend ? When would she understand her affection ? When would she give any opening for sympathy ? These were the questions which Lady Catharine asked herself. The reply came in a chill sense of disappointment. And Alice, notwithstanding her instability of character, would have bitterly reproached herself if she had known the pain which her inattention to Lady Catharine's habits, and her wilful impatience of anything approaching to reproof so frequently caused.

Mr. Clifford and Ruth were at the school together ; and Mr. Clifford, thinking that Alice would be less afraid with Ruth than with him, left them with a class whilst he went to examine the boys.

Teaching, unless we have a natural taste for it, is

a very wearisome undertaking. Alice soon thought it so ; and longing to have the lessons finished, spoke impatiently and rather unjustly to a child who was not perfect in her lessons. Injustice produced irritation of temper ; irritation became want of respect ; want of respect made Alice very angry. If Ruth had not been present she would have thrown down the book and left the class to itself. As it was, she cast an imploring glance at Ruth, entreating her to interpose. Ruth said but little and in a much quieter tone than Alice, but she enforced instant attention ; and Alice listened with surprise to the steady, orderly course of instruction which followed. Ruth seemed as much at home in her duties as if she had been accustomed to them from infancy. When the lessons were ended, Ruth did not make any observation upon Alice's failure ; but proposed that they should inquire whether her father was ready to go. Alice gave a silent moody assent.

"Well ! Alice," said Mr. Clifford, as they took the road to the parsonage, where Alice was to have her luncheon ; "how did you manage ? Were the children perfect ?"

"Not quite, papa," interposed Ruth ; "Jane Stevens was naughty, and Kate Morrison was very idle."

"They were all naughty, I think," said Alice.

"All ! rather a sweeping condemnation," said Mr. Clifford. "But was it a great trouble to you, Alice ?"

"Yes" was upon Alice's lips, but she was afraid to speak it.

"You will grow more accustomed to it by and by," observed Ruth. "You will know how to manage better."

"No, never ; you are mistaken there, Ruth. I shall never manage, I shall never do anything."

"And why not, my dear," said Mr. Clifford ;

"why are you to be so much more stupid than the rest of the world?"

"Because—I don't know—because—I shall be; because I am in everything—I always was. No one is ever pleased with me," she added in an under voice.

Mr. Clifford drew Alice's arm within his, and pointing to a woman who was crossing the road lower down, he said, "Ruth, just go forward and tell Mrs. Barnes to call at the Parsonage this evening; I want to see her."

Ruth ran on, and Mr. Clifford, slackening his pace, said, "Alice, my love, I am one of your oldest friends, and old friends are privileged. Will you let me ask you a question?"

Alice's hand trembled a little, but she did not speak.

"You are not happy, my dear," continued Mr. Clifford; "Ruth tells me that she thinks you are not, and I can see it myself. Can I help you?"

"No, indeed. I am not unhappy; Ruth does not know about me," answered Alice; "I am vexed at not doing better at the school, but I cannot help it."

"I am afraid that is not quite sincere," rejoined Mr. Clifford; "however, as you had rather not talk to me, you shall not; only remember, that when I can ever be of use to you I shall be quite ready to be so; for your own sake, and"—Mr. Clifford spoke with some hesitation—"for your mother's sake."

"My mother!" repeated Alice, "every one loved her."

"And every one will love her child, Alice; if only she will follow in the same footsteps."

"Lady Catharine once told me I should never be like her," said Alice, with some bitterness.

"Lady Catharine was speaking of your natural

disposition," replied Mr. Clifford; "you are hasty, eager, and easily led: your mother was gentle and firm. By nature, you certainly are not like her; but it does not follow that you may not become so."

"But no persons are exactly alike," said Alice, rather perversely.

Mr. Clifford did not seem to notice her manner, he only answered rather more gravely than before.

"The same Pattern is given to us all, Alice: a perfect one. The better we are, the more nearly we shall approach to it."

"Mamma had always some one to love her," continued Alice.

"Perhaps, my dear child, you do not understand the love which is given you," answered Mr. Clifford. "Because it is hidden by a certain stiffness, and sometimes coldness of manner, you may think that it does not exist."

"It is difficult to be always believing one is loved," said Alice. "One longs to see it and know it."

"Yes, I own that," replied Mr. Clifford. "It is a great trial of what may be called human faith. Still, actions are the best proofs of love."

"Yes, I know, I really do know it," exclaimed Alice, softened by finding that her troubles were acknowledged to be real. "Very often I say to myself, that I am ungrateful; still things go on just the same."

"But, Alice,—you must not think that I am wishing to find fault with you because I ask the question,—have you ever seriously set yourself to alter the state of things? You call Lady Catharine cold; have you ever yourself given her occasion to be otherwise?"

"I don't know; I have tried to love her," said Alice.

"But trying to love is useless. We must act if we wish to feel. Lady Catharine has devoted herself in action to you, that you acknowledge; perhaps you have not done the same for her."

Alice could not find what to answer.

"It is a very important question for you, my dear," continued Mr. Clifford, more authoritatively; "a great deal of your happiness must depend upon the answer you can give to it. Will you think of it?"

They had reached the Parsonage gate as Mr. Clifford said this. Ruth was waiting for them there. Alice withdrew herself from him, and walked into the house alone.

Ruth looked at her father for an explanation. He appeared vexed; and she did not like to ask him the cause.

He referred to it, however, by saying, "Alice is very reserved."

"Yes," replied Ruth; "that is, papa, she is reserved sometimes; but she is very odd. I think what she wants is some one to love her. Nothing, it seems, will make her happy except that."

"Nothing will make any of us happy but that," replied Mr. Clifford, with a peculiar, grave smile, on his lips, which Ruth did not thoroughly understand.

Mr. Clifford turned into a path leading to a distant part of the garden, and Ruth followed him.

"Papa," she said, presently, "if you have not influence over Alice, who can have?"

"It is not influence which we must trust to, Ruth," replied Mr. Clifford; "we must have the main-spring in ourselves if we mean to be worth anything. It is religion which Alice wants."

"And affection, too, papa," said Ruth.

Mr. Clifford walked on in silence.

Ruth did not feel that she might venture to interrupt him: he seemed thinking deeply.

At last he said, "We must not separate religion and affection, my dearest child."

"It does not seem that they have much to do with each other," observed Ruth, in a tone of surprise.

"But," replied Mr. Clifford, "we are told in the Bible that religion is to make us happy, and we feel in ourselves that it is happiness to love and be loved in return; there must, therefore, be love in religion: otherwise it could not satisfy us."

"Yes," replied Ruth, doubtfully.

"Perhaps, I am not speaking clearly," continued Mr. Clifford; "I will refer to Alice. The craving of her mind is for affection, at least so she thinks; but if to-morrow she were to receive the most perfect human affection we can imagine, and to give her own to the same extent, she could not be happy for a continuance; because it is religion alone which can render her so."

"But, surely, papa," exclaimed Ruth, "she might still be religious. We may love people without doing wrong."

"What do you mean by being religious, Ruth?"

"Keeping God's commandments; trying to please Him; having faith in Him;" answered Ruth.

"That is what you mean. Now, what does the Bible mean?"

"I don't know; I can't understand," answered Ruth, with an air of great astonishment. "It says the same, I believe."

"Do you remember," inquired Mr. Clifford, "our Saviour's answer to the question of the lawyer; 'Which is the great commandment in the law?' 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.'"

"Yes," replied Ruth, thoughtfully, "I know that

religion is the love of God, but I did not think of saying it."

"Love," repeated Mr. Clifford: "not obedience merely; still less fear; but love. A real, warm, devoted, intense feeling of the heart. Love to our blessed Lord as to a human friend; only with the fullest, most unwavering confidence in his affection. Such a feeling as will make us turn to Him in all our troubles, as sure of His sympathy; which will make us delight in the smallest occasions of showing our affection; which will make us find real happiness in prayer, and reading the Bible, and receiving the Holy Communion. This is religion, Ruth; the religion which is to make us blest in life, and full of peace in death."

"Papa," said Ruth, in a tone of deep seriousness, "I am afraid I shall never feel this; but I hoped I was trying to be religious."

"I have been speaking of the end of religion, my dearest Ruth, not the beginning. The effort at obedience must come first; the joy of love will be our reward afterwards. When it is ours we shall have attained the object of our lives; we shall be happy."

"But," said Ruth, "we were intended to love our fellow-creatures also; it comes to us quite naturally."

"Yes, to love them deeply and devotedly, but not to rest our highest affection upon them; not to feel that without them life would have neither interest nor hope."

"I should be very miserable without you and mamma," said Ruth.

"Yet the time will come when we must part, my dear child. If you give us your whole heart you are resting your happiness on a broken reed."

"But it seems so difficult, so impossible, not to love one's friends," exclaimed Ruth. "I always feel with Alice when she talks to me about it."

"I do not for an instant wish you not to love them most dearly," replied Mr. Clifford; "only, not to put them first. I will tell you a mistake which many persons—young persons especially—are apt to make. It is the secret of a vast portion of their unhappiness and disappointment. They say they wish to be religious, and they set about performing their duties strictly; they pray regularly, and go to church, and read the Bible, and try to correct their evil tempers,—and, in a measure, they succeed and improve; but still religion does not make them happy."

Mr. Clifford paused, and Ruth thought, though she did not express it, that this was her own case.

"Such persons," continued Mr. Clifford, "are servants, very good servants; but they are not children; I mean, of course, in feeling. Now why do you think this is?"

"Because they are not so good as they ought to be, I suppose," answered Ruth.

"But they are in earnest, trying very much: the secret is, that they are giving their obedience to God, but their hearts to their fellow-creatures. They do not think of God as their Friend. I use the word in its plain, literal sense. They do not feel that He loves them. They pray for great things, but they do not mention before Him the little circumstances which interest them, or make them anxious. They own that their Saviour has redeemed them from eternal punishment, but they do not see that He saves them from daily annoyance. They take their trifling comforts and pleasures as matters of course; whereas, if they thought rightly, every petty gratification would be a source of delight, as the mark of an especial love."

"But it seems almost irreverent to think of religion in such little instances," said Ruth.

"How do you feel towards me, Ruth, when you thank me for a trifling kindness?"

"That is so different," answered Ruth.

"Ah! my love, there is the mistake. We think that the love of God is something totally unlike the love of our fellow-creatures, when, in fact, it is the very same feeling, only purified and exalted. As I said before, it is not obedience, or fear, or even reverence; though, of course, all these must exist with it. It is actually love. As we could love a human being, and give up our hearts to him in the confidence of meeting a full return, so we may and must love God, if we ever intend that religion should be our happiness."

"God is so far above us," said Ruth, in a low voice.

"And therefore, Ruth, once He became man that we might learn to love Him."


Ruth sighed despondingly.

"I would not for the world discourage you, my dearest child," continued Mr. Clifford. "Obedience, and reverence, and fear—which I can quite understand are all you yet associate with religion—are most excellent in themselves; quite necessary as a beginning. But what I wish you, and Madeline, and Alice to feel, is that there is something far beyond—something, which if you really strive after, you must one day attain. When you renew your vows at your confirmation, I would wish you to do it in the spirit of children."

"If we were good we might do so," answered Ruth.

"You are fast emerging from childhood, Ruth," continued Mr. Clifford. "You can look back upon your early life, and judge of and learn from it. When you were a little child, did your mother and I love you because you were good?"

Ruth was about to answer "Yes;" but she



stopped herself. "You loved me when I was good," she replied; "you often told me so."

"Certainly I did: but often you were naughty. Did we cease to love you then?"

"You were displeased with me," replied Ruth.

"But did we cast you off? Was not ours a patient, enduring love, which bore with your faults, and watched with delight the slightest improvement?"

"Yes," replied Ruth, heartily. "I should never have improved at all but for that."

"And now," continued Mr. Clifford, "you are reaching an age when all that you have felt and acted upon towards your earthly parents is to be felt and acted upon towards God. God has been pleased so to order our earthly existence that all things belonging to it should be the types of our spiritual existence. As we read of death and the resurrection, in the course of the sun, in the seed sown in the ground, in the transformation of insects; so we may read the course of our mortal life in the history of our early years. The love which you have felt for me is the love which one day, if you ever wish for happiness, you must feel towards God."

"I cannot fancy it the same," said Ruth.

"In one respect it will not be the same," replied her father. "As it is to be directed to an infinitely Higher Object, so it must be, in its perfection, infinitely more satisfying."

"Yes, in its perfection," said Ruth, doubtfully.

"And even in its imperfection—in its germ—it must bring more real happiness than any inferior affection. There can be no distrust in it. It must unite all that is deepest and purest of the most engrossing earthly love; the fond reverence of a child for a parent—the entire confidence of brother with brother—the fulness of sympathy of the nearer ties which we form for ourselves—all hallowed, strength-

ened, ennobled by the sense that the Being to whom we have devoted ourselves is Almighty and Unchangeable."

"I should like to think that I could ever feel it," said Ruth.

"Wish for it—and, if you cannot do that, pray that you may be taught to wish for it—my dear child, and you will have taken a first step towards realizing it. Too many persons never wish for it; they do not know—they scarcely ever think what the love of God means. They have a low notion of religion; they suppose it is only intended to make them what they call good;—moral, well-conducted."

"But it must do so," said Ruth.

"Yes, indeed, it must; or it has no reality: but it is also intended to do much more—to make us happy. Even in the common view of religion, however, there is a mistake. We can never serve God rightly in our daily duties unless we worship Him, and are grateful to Him, and trust, and pray to, and honour Him—in one word, give Him our hearts and love Him. We see every day the difference between the service of love and that of fear or necessity. One is happiness, the other wearying labour."

Ruth repeated the word "happiness" to herself, as if unable to realize what her father said.

"This is not a truth to be understood by reasoning," continued Mr. Clifford; "yet it is a certain fact that no one ever loved God and was disappointed. Ask any person—however poor, or suffering, or lonely—whether he would exchange the feeling for any other, however pure and strong, and he will say 'No.' And as you go forward in life and find yourself more exposed to its trials, Ruth, you will understand what I mean when I say that it gives us rest. You are young now; rest scarcely seems a blessing; by and by it will be your one great longing, and

nothing but the intense devotion of the affections to God will give it."

"It seems to me as if I could be satisfied if any one like myself loved me better than anything else in the world," said Ruth.

Mr. Clifford smiled sadly. "Ah, Ruth! so you may be satisfied for a time—many have been—but the satisfaction cannot continue. If there is nothing higher—no one Perfect and Immortal Being who has the first place—there must be disappointment in the end."

Ruth looked incredulous.

"I cannot expect you to believe all this at once," said Mr. Clifford. "I would not have said it if I had not felt that you were approaching an age when you might need it. Only I will ask you to think of this—even in human affection the knowledge that we are beloved tends to increase, and very often to excite our feelings in return. There are facts in the Bible which place the love of God to us beyond the possibility of doubt; and there are words in the Bible so full of gentle, tender, wonderful affection, that the most anxious heart could require no more. They are to be found in the prayer of our Blessed Lord for His disciples, and for those who afterwards should believe in Him. There seems an especial care that no doubt should exist upon this point. The petition is, that 'all may be one'—one with God, loved with that same unutterable love which was the perfection of our Lord's blessedness in heaven. Ruth, my child, will you read those words thoughtfully, with reverence, kneeling before God and praying Him to teach you to understand them?"

What Ruth might answer Mr. Clifford did not wait to hear. He imprinted a kiss upon her forehead and left her alone, to think.

And was Ruth in a state of mind to think? Could

she comprehend her father's words? Comprehend them she did as far as that implies understanding their literal meaning; and even in a higher sense she could in a measure enter into them; for Ruth, like many of her age whom God has gifted with warm affections and thoughtful minds, had often felt the longing for some devoted affection to satisfy her dream of happiness. Madeline could live from day to day without thinking of the future—contented in the peaceful enjoyments of her home, the fondness of her parents, the sympathy of her sister, the pleasant, unrestrained companionship of Alice; but Ruth's mind was continually wandering forth to the unknown years which lay before her, seeking to know what she should do, how she should feel, where her lot would be cast. And in those wanderings, those visions of a life yet more blest, more exciting and engrossing than was yet granted her, the one great ingredient of happiness was always a perfect affection. Mr. Clifford had now told her of means by which this vision of happiness might be realized, and Ruth's trust in her father's truth made her listen to him with a degree of confidence which she might not otherwise have felt. She saw that he was speaking from his own personal experience, and she could, in a certain way, suppose it possible one day to do the same. But as yet the deep realities of religion, its power of occupying the mind and satisfying the heart, were to Ruth like the description of a foreign country to a person who has never beheld it. Its existence is fully believed, but it presents to the imagination only an unsubstantial picture. Perhaps it was not possible that, at such an early age, Ruth should enter fully into the conversation which had just passed; and before the peace which Mr. Clifford had described could, even in the future, be hers, there was much, very much to be done. Ruth's conscience told her this whilst her

father was talking with her; and when he had left her, the conviction returned more strongly.

Since the visit to Redford Church, Ruth's mind had never been entirely at rest. She had mentioned to her mother the interview with Mrs. De Lacy and Florence, and the fact of having spent a few minutes at Sheldon Lodge. The acknowledgment did not require much moral courage, for Mrs. Clifford was too considerate to find fault where apparently no harm was intended. Mrs. De Lacy was a person whom every one visited, and Mrs. Clifford herself called upon her almost immediately afterwards, and although it happened they did not meet, yet the acquaintance was put upon a regular footing.

But Ruth was not the happier because her mamma was kind: it was more than she knew herself to deserve. It was not that she could accuse herself of having done anything seriously wrong; but she had consulted her own will all that afternoon at Redford. She had overlooked the question of what might please her mother most, and had followed her own inclination; and, as a punishment it seemed, she had been led into a secret—a trifling one apparently, but still a secret. Ruth had that fretting sense of uneasiness continually about her, which is the natural consequence of a heart not right with God. She tried to put aside the idea of having been in any way to blame, or having brought a secret upon herself. She could not make up her mind to practise any close self-examination; and, forgetting her own needs, she thought only of Alice.

When she begged Alice to attend to her duty at the school, and when, by eagerness and perseverance, she gained her point, there was something pleasant to dwell upon. She could look back to her outward acts and be satisfied.

And this was the way in which Ruth found rest

for her conscience now, when it suggested that something was not quite right within; and that this "something" must be rooted out before it would be in the least possible to attain, even in the faintest degree, the happiness in religion which her father had described.

She said to herself that she would be more energetic than ever in doing all that was to be done at home, and would strive to keep Alice up to her resolutions; and she thought of one or two ways in which she might be more useful in the school; and then the feeling of self-contentment glided unobserved into her breast, and she was at peace.

There are two kinds of peace—true and false.

"Ruth, you will walk back with me to the Manor," said Alice, when luncheon was over. "Lady Catharine will be home soon, so I must not stay here."

There was an accent of bitterness in this remark which did not escape Mr. Clifford's ear. He stopped as he was leaving the room, and said, "Lady Catharine likes to be welcomed, I suppose. Every one does. Half the pleasure of going out is the satisfaction of having some one to hear all you have done when you return."

Alice blushed a little, but repeated her request to Ruth, saying it would be dull to wait by herself.

Ruth had in her mind the recollection of a previous engagement, and Madeline reminded her of it. They were to take a small parcel of clothes to a woman at the other end of the parish.

"It is a dreadfully disagreeable day," said Ruth, who happened to have on a neat new morning dress; would it do to wait till to-morrow?"

"We promised," replied Madeline; "that is, if we could manage it."

"But you cannot because of its being so dirty," interposed Alice; "that settles the matter."

"No, indeed, Alice," exclaimed Ruth, laughing; "one cannot manage things quite so easily as that. If we have promised we must go, though it is dirty."

"Then you will not consider me," said Alice, with an air of disappointment; "and I have not said a word to you about the school; and I thought we should have had time for a nice talk before Lady Catharine came in."

"What do you say, Maddy?" asked Ruth; "do you think we can put it off?"

"No," replied Madeline, without hesitation; "Alice will have a good many opportunities of talking about the school, before it is her turn to go again; but Mrs. Corbin wants the clothes very much."

"Only you need not both go, I suppose," said Alice.

"Mamma does not like our walking so far alone," answered Madeline.

"I declare you are quite provoking to-day, Madeline," said Alice. "You put obstacles in the way of everything I propose."

Madeline's cheek crimsoned with anger, and a half-uttered word escaped her lips. She walked to the window, and stood looking out of it for a few moments.

"You should not be unkind to Madeline," observed Ruth, in a low tone to Alice.

Alice began to excuse herself.

Presently Madeline came back to them and said, "I have thought what we can do. Martha, our housemaid, was to go this afternoon to see her mother, who lives very near Mrs. Corbin. I will take her with me."

"That will not be quite as pleasant as if I were with you," said Ruth.

"No!" and Madeline smiled sweetly. "There

are not many things as pleasant as to have you with me, but I should like you to go with Alice."

"Thank you, Maddy, very much indeed," said Alice, coming forward, and giving her a kiss. "I shall enjoy my half-hour's talk with Ruth immensely."

Madeline hoped she would, and left the room. Ruth followed her.

"Maddy, it seems unkind to let you go alone; but the fact is, I do want to talk to Alice. I have a great deal to say to her about the school; and I really think she is beginning to listen to me. It would be an immense pity to miss doing her good if one has the opportunity."

"Yes, indeed, it would. I am so delighted that she will let you talk to her. Nobody else will be of as much use to her."

"And you don't very much mind?" inquired Ruth, affectionately.

"Mind! oh, no! not in the least; and I shall have all Mrs. Corbin's gratitude to myself to console me."

Madeline ran merrily up the stairs. Ruth stood below, slightly uncomfortable.

Just then Mr. Clifford came out of his room.

"In a brown study, Ruth? what is the matter? What are you going to do with yourself this afternoon?"

"I am going back to the Manor with Alice," answered Ruth.

"To the Manor, are you? but that is not a very long walk for a summer's afternoon. I thought you and Madeline were to have taken Mrs. Corbin's parcel to her?"

"Yes, so we intended, papa; but Alice wished me to be with her, and then Madeline said she would walk alone; that is, not alone exactly, but with Martha. Martha is going to see her mother."

"Oh!" was all Mr. Clifford's reply, as he leant against the balustrade, thinking.

Ruth was not entirely pleased with the "Oh!" it seemed like dissatisfaction. She was going away, but her father called her back.

"Ruth, my child, do you remember the conversation we had the other night about Alice?"

"Yes, papa," said Ruth, blushing.

"I only wished to remind you of it. Don't set your heart upon converting and influencing Alice; you will go wrong if you do."

"But, dear papa, may I not make her do right if I can?"

"By all means, to the very utmost; but take care that you do not go the wrong way to work. Remember, we must think of our own duties first."

"Yes, papa, of course."

After those words, "of course," there is nothing more to be said. Besides, Mr. Clifford was just then particularly engaged.

Ruth returned to the drawing-room, and found her mamma there, ready with the parcel for Mrs. Corbin. Mrs. Clifford looked a little disappointed when Ruth mentioned her intention of going to the Manor.

"It would be a dull, disagreeable walk for Madeline," she said; "and Alice would not have long to remain alone; and Mrs. Corbin had wished particularly to see Ruth. If you remember, my dear," she continued, "it was your own proposal to go to her, when your papa told you she was one of the persons you might read to occasionally."

"Yes," answered Ruth, hesitating; "but I thought—" She stopped. "No, I did not think about it; but Madeline could read instead of me."

"I will not interfere with you, my love; do as you feel it best. You know I am always glad for you to be any pleasure or comfort to Alice."

Nothing more was said. Ruth could scarcely tell why she felt as if she was doing wrong. She spent several moments in thinking, and at last decided that it was a mere waste of time to worry herself with over scrupulousness. She could see no harm ; and neither her papa nor her mamma had found actual fault with her, so that there could be no precise reason for not keeping her engagement with Alice, in the hope possibly of being of service to her.

And Ruth was not absolutely faulty in her decision. It was not the question whether or not she should go to the Manor which caused her disquietude. It was the consciousness that she had been consulting her own wishes ; looking first to inclination, and then to duty, and so allowing her judgment to be biassed.

Still she went ; it would have been unkind, she thought, to Alice, not to do so. And still she hoped that by going she might be of use in strengthening Alice in the path of duty.

CHAPTER IX.

RUTH and Alice pursued their walk to the Manor in silence. Ruth's zeal for Alice's improvement had received a check, and Alice was apparently occupied with a subject of sufficient interest to stop the usual flow of her conversation. They had entered the park before either of them spoke, and then it was Alice, who said :

"Maddy is excessively good ; but she is not a bit like you, Ruth."

"No," replied Ruth, laughing. "Mamma often says we have the most twin-like faces, and the most untwin-like minds of any persons she ever knew. The wonder is we get on so well together."

"I don't know what it is about her," pursued Alice ; "but sometimes I think I am afraid of her : and yet it is very strange, I am not afraid either—it would be absurd ; she is so much younger, and I can say all sorts of nonsense to her, much more than I can to you."

"I am graver than she is, naturally," replied Ruth.

"Yes, so you are : yet Madeline is not like the girls at school ; though I am sure we used to talk nonsense enough."

"There can be no doubt of that," observed Ruth.

"Ah ! but not in your days ; we were pieces of perfection then. After you went was the time. There was no one to keep order. Florence and I used to say it was very wrong, but you know we had no power to stop anything."

"I should not have thought Florence cared about it," said Ruth.

"I dare say you would not: you have a prejudice against her."

"No, Alice, not a prejudice; that means a feeling without a reason. Now I have quite a sufficient reason for distrusting Florence;" and, as she said this, Ruth's voice was a little hurried. "But really and truly I have no prejudice against her. I liked her a great deal better the other day; and I should have liked her a great deal more if it had not been for that stupid nonsense about Justine."

"Florence is not so wrong there," said Alice, mysteriously.

"So you have told me two or three times when we have talked about it. But what am I to think? How can it be necessary to exact a promise? I am not going to spread a bad report of Justine everywhere; it would be uncharitable: at the same time there can be no harm in saying that we knew her at Mrs. Carter's."

"That would bring on other questions, and would be dangerous. I cannot explain exactly why, but it would be; and, at all events, now your promise is given."

This was a very provoking fact to be reminded of. It made Ruth hasten on a little before Alice, and relapse into silence.

"One thing, Ruth, I must tell you," said Alice, renewing the conversation, as they entered her own sitting-room, just at the point at which it had been broken off; "that you don't know the good you may do by having made such a promise. Florence will be obliged to you always, and so will Justine; and if you take care you may guide them to anything you like."

"Guide Justine!" exclaimed Ruth, surprised;

"but she is not going to stay in this neighbourhood?"

"Possibly; you must not ask questions,—perhaps she may some time or other; and if she does, you may do a great deal for her. And as for Florence herself, she says that she can never imagine you as young as you are; and that when she met you the other day, she felt at once that you were just as superior as you used to be."

Alice spoke without any intention of flattery. Flattery between girls, who had known each other intimately from childhood, was out of the question. Perhaps it was the knowledge of this which made Ruth listen with patience to such undisguised praise. She made but a slight effort to turn the conversation by saying,

"And when did you and Florence find time for this long discourse about me?"

"Oh! when we were together at the lower end of the church; Florence began the subject directly. She was anxious to know whether I thought you would agree to keep Justine's secret."

"And what did you say?"

"I could not tell; I was afraid not. I thought you disliked secrets; and I was to have asked you about it: but seeing Justine took us by surprise. Florence did not expect her till an hour later."

Here Alice went away to take off her walking dress, and left Ruth standing moodily by the fireplace, thinking how silly she had been in giving a promise which after all it seemed Florence scarcely expected to receive. However, as the common and most delusive saying is, "the thing was done and could not be helped, and she must make the best of it;" which just then meant to forget it.

With a view to forgetfulness, Ruth began another subject when Alice came back.

"We will talk a little now about your troubles and the school, Alice; shall we?"

Alice's troubles, however, dated farther back than the school.

They originated in what she called Lady Catharine's "tiresomeness." The school was a secondary consideration; perhaps in time she might learn to manage and teach, but the home worries were unendurable! and she began a narration similar to that to which Ruth had many times listened before.

Ruth, however, dexterously diverted the current of her ideas. She had already given all the advice that was to be given, as to patience, humility, gratitude, reverence; and she had quickness enough to perceive that one thing which Alice required was to be furnished with interesting occupation, to prevent her from dwelling peevishly upon trifles. She referred again, therefore, to the school, and her own difficulties when first she commenced teaching, and the mode in which she had overcome them by taking her father's advice. From the school, she proceeded to speak of the poor people, and to ask whether Alice would be inclined to join with Madeline and herself in saving up money to buy clothes, and make them; and whether she could assist them by keeping the accounts of the shoe club: all which pleased Alice, and made her feel herself a person of some use in the world.

"You are very, very kind, dear Ruth," she said, when Ruth had made these propositions. "You are never worried or out of temper, and you are always ready to help me. I think I may be good for something after all—don't you—if I take to the schools and the poor people?"

"Who ever doubted it?" said Ruth, amused at the simplicity of the question.

"I doubt it very often," replied Alice, with a sud-

den change of manner. "You don't know me, Ruth; you, who are so good, and have always been good—you don't know what thoughts are in my mind sometimes; they would frighten you, they are so wild and strange—as if it was impossible, as if it was not meant I should be good. But people can be good if they like, can't they?"

"Alice," said Ruth, earnestly; "I wish you would talk to papa."

"I cannot; he frightens me: and he would not understand. To-day, when he spoke to me, I could not have answered him, as he wished to be answered, for all the world. There is no one but you, Ruth; no one! When we were at school, I could have said more to you than to any person; only you were never inclined to listen."

Ruth turned to her with an expression of real interest which could not be mistaken.

"I am willing to listen to you at all times, upon every subject, dear Alice," she said; "but you sometimes own that you are changeable. When you change, it can be no wonder that I should change likewise. And though you say I would not listen to you at school, you must remember that whilst you professed to be fond of me, you were always going with others; and especially with some whom I particularly disliked: and now you have Florence Trevelyan."

"Florence! that is absurd! How could Florence ever be your rival?"

"Because you would make her so. You do not know your own mind. If Florence is to be with you much, she will guide you entirely."

"Never. I have no respect for her judgment, though I like her. But you might guide her."

"I!" exclaimed Ruth. "I! who am so much younger!"

"Yes ; because she respects you."

"If Florence thinks about respecting people," said Ruth ; "she had better not have secrets with Justine Le Vergnier."

"It is only one secret. The fact is, that poor Justine has had a good deal of trouble, and Florence knows it ; and now it would be unkind to cast her off, and do her harm."

"All a mystery," said Ruth, shaking her head.

"But you cannot blame her for being kind, at any rate," continued Alice ; "and you cannot blame me for calling her improved—years ago she would have thought only of herself."

"Yes ; that is true," answered Ruth.

"And now she is in the neighbourhood, and you may do her good," pursued Alice ; "only you must not be jealous."

Ruth smiled at the word "jealous." It was much too strong for any feeling which she entertained either towards Alice or Florence.

"I am not in the least jealous," she replied ; "but, as I said before, I should like you to know your own mind."

"Hark ! was not that the hall-bell ?" exclaimed Alice. "Did you hear a carriage ? How extremely unfortunate !" She ran to the door and listened. "Yes ; she is come home. How tiresome ! Ruth, dear, just let me give you one caution. If Lady Catharine talks about Florence, don't speak as if I was anything of a friend of hers ; I mean anything particular. Take care what you say, that is all."

"Alice ! Alice !" exclaimed Ruth, with a look of great annoyance ; "how can you bear to have mysteries about everything ? So foolish it is ; so extremely silly,—and wrong too ! Why must not Lady Catharine know all that you say or do ?"

"It is a mere trifle, no harm," answered Alice. "Only there was a foolish mistake of mine the other morning, I can't explain now; but there is really no harm. Won't you believe me?"

Ruth turned silently away.

"Good bye to confidence, then," exclaimed Alice. "How could I have been so absurd as to think you cared for me!"

"You don't give me your confidence," said Ruth, quietly. "You do things first, and ask me to conceal them afterwards."

"Do things first! Really, Ruth, you are too silly. One would think I had committed murder, and wanted you to hide it. But we won't talk about it."

Alice was going away to meet Lady Catharine. Ruth prevented her.

"I have no wish to be in any way unkind to you, Alice; but, if you will take my advice, you will give up mysteries."

"I always meant to take your advice for the future; but this is a case past."

Ruth saw that Alice was growing proud and angry. She thought of the suggestions she had just given regarding the school and the poor people. Alice seemed upon the point of attending to them, and they would materially aid in forming her character. If she were checked in her good inclinations they might not return. And what she required was more silence than anything else. It would be easy on another occasion to show her that she was wrong. These ideas passed rapidly through Ruth's mind.

"Well! let it be for this once," she said, hastily; "but we must talk more upon the subject by and by."

"Thank you a thousand times. And you will love me still?" said Alice, giving her a hearty kiss. "I love you dearly."

The kiss was returned, but Ruth was not certain of the desired love, and evaded an answer.

"Is Miss Lennox within?" was Lady Catharine's first inquiry after giving some particular directions respecting the purchases made at Cottington, and sending a message to the groom to look carefully after the two fat carriage horses, as they had had a hard day's work.

"Miss Lennox and Miss Clifford had been in the house more than an hour," was the reply received; and if Alice had seen the gleam of pleasure which lighted up Lady Catharine's face at the mere mention of her name, she might have been satisfied that her absence or presence were no matters of indifference. Lady Catharine really walked quickly up the stairs.

"Well! my love," she exclaimed, as she entered the apartment; "I thought I should surprise you. I have returned sooner than I expected."

"We heard the carriage, ma'am," answered Alice.

This chilling answer was quite sufficient for Lady Catharine. She turned to Ruth. "And how long have you been here, my dear? I did not know Alice would have a companion whilst I was away."

Ruth answered the question; and Lady Catharine put several others formally, and with that air of indifference which betrays thoughts wandering to other subjects.

Alice offered to take her bonnet and shawl away.

Lady Catharine thanked her, but declined rather coldly; and taking a note from her reticule gave it to her, saying: "Miss Trevelyan sent you this, Alice; it is an invitation, I believe, to a pic-nic. Mrs. De Lacy mentioned the subject to me, but I have not decided upon accepting it. And here is an invitation for your mamma also, Ruth; which I offered to bring."

Alice kept her note unopened till Lady Catharine was gone. It was a long one, and two or three times whilst Alice was perusing it she looked anxiously towards the door, and listened. When she had finished, she replaced it in the envelope in evident perplexity.

"Shall you wish to go?" inquired Ruth.

"Yes; I think I should like it; but"—here Alice paused, and her colour changed as the sound of a closing door at the end of the passage warned them that Lady Catharine might be about to return. "Ruth," she continued, speaking in a hurried tone; "I should be so much obliged if you could do me a favour?"

"Well! what?"

"This note—if you would take it. Florence writes so foolishly I can't show it to Lady Catharine. I told her to be careful, but she is not. If you would take it and go."

"I!" repeated Ruth; "it is not mine."

"But don't you understand? If you have it; if you take it home, you can burn it, or keep it; in short, I can say that you have it: and if Lady Catharine asks to see it, there will be an answer ready. It is only just for once; indeed, it shall not happen again."

"This system of yours is entirely wrong, Alice," replied Ruth; "and, if you persist in it, you will repent it. You never can continue to keep your confidence from Lady Catharine without getting into difficulties."

"I know it quite well," answered Alice; "but this is a peculiar case. As I told you, there was a stupid mistake the other morning, and this note will only puzzle Lady Catharine. I will take care that Florence shall not write in the same way again. To prove to you that there is no harm in the note, I do not in

the least mind your seeing it." As she said this, Alice put the paper into Ruth's hand. "Do go, please go," she continued, "it shall all be explained another day."

"I had rather not," replied Ruth, laying the note on the table.

"Oh, Ruth! how unkind! And I thought you loved me!"

"But, Alice, I cannot see that it is right."

Alice's answer was in a tone of nervous anxiety. "Ruth, if you would only believe me—only trust me—I wish to be guided by you in everything."

"And if I say that Lady Catharine ought to see it, will you show it to-morrow?" inquired Ruth.

"Yes, yes; to-morrow, or some day; anything you please. Dear Ruth! I depend upon you more than upon any one."

Lady Catharine's voice was heard. Alice opened the door. "Pray, pray go; good bye."

"But it will be strange for me to be gone in such a moment," said Ruth.

"No, no; she understands that you have heaps of engagements."

"And you will do what I tell you?"

"Yes, you shall advise me entirely."

Ruth still with a hesitating step, drew near the door; then, as Lady Catharine was really heard approaching, she gave Alice a hasty shake of the hand and ran down stairs.

CHAPTER X.

RUTH's first impulse, when she found herself walking quietly through the park, out of reach of Lady Catharine's quick eye, was to open Florence Trevelyan's note. Yet, as she did so, the feeling which prompted her to look round and see if any person was near, was unusual and disagreeable. It was the sense of being a party to deception, of all things most galling to the conscience of one like Ruth, sincere both by nature and education. And when the note was first read, it seemed as if there could have been no cause for Alice's uneasiness. Florence wrote warmly, entreating Alice to persuade Lady Catharine to allow her to join in a pic-nic party, which was to take place soon, though the exact day was not fixed. Ruth could not comprehend why Alice should have objected to Lady Catharine's seeing this; but after a second perusal, she turned to the other side of the paper, and perceived an additional sentence: "I am not the only person wishing to see you; things are going just as we wished; they are all but settled."

Ruth uttered an exclamation of disgust. These perpetual mysteries were becoming intolerable. The person referred to must be Justine; but what was meant by all things being settled, was beyond Ruth's comprehension. She pondered much upon the subject as she sauntered leisurely home, purposely prolonging her walk that she might have leisure for thought.

The conclusion at which she arrived was no explanation of the note; but simply a determination

to use her utmost efforts to persuade Alice to be open in all cases ; and, as a commencement, to have no more communications with Florence Trevelyan which could not be made known to Lady Catharine.

Ruth's engagements for the next day were fixed. Her morning studies had been marked out for her by her mother, and her afternoon employment had been settled by her father. She had no spare moments ; yet, when Mrs. Clifford expressed a wish to have a book taken to the Manor, Ruth threw aside her history, and proposed to be the bearer of it. Madeline however interposed, saying that she was obliged to go into the village on some business of Mrs. Corbin's ; and, as she should pass the Manor lodge, the book might be left there. Ruth looked somewhat annoyed, and was vexed, she said, to lose the walk as it was so fine ; a declaration which surprised Madeline not a little ; Ruth's usual theory being, that to go out early after breakfast was to destroy the comfort of the day. No one, however, could do Mrs. Corbin's business as well as Madeline, and the affair was quickly settled, Ruth sitting down again to her history ; then beginning a note to Alice, which was presently torn to atoms, and recurring once more to her book with the unpleasant consciousness that her words had not been quite sincere.

Madeline set out on her walk with a light heart, which was not the less light that something of the merry thoughtlessness of childhood had left her for ever. It was not mere external attraction which could now give her pleasure. The loveliness of the scenery around Laneton, with the cottages peeping from amongst masses of trees ; the sunshine glancing over the meadows ; the blue mists upon the distant hills ; the white curling foam of the waves rolling in upon the shore ; and the vast illimitable sky seeming to embrace all earthly beauty in an atmosphere of

purity, had now a deeper and a truer meaning than in former years she could see or understand; for these things were not merely pleasant to the eye—they were the signs of the love of God. Madeline's mind was just opening to the perception, that religion adds tenfold to the enjoyment of life as it takes tenfold from its bitterness; the efforts so early made were bringing their reward; and even her duties, as they became habitual, began to be agreeable.

And the ways of religion are indeed ways of pleasantness: the yoke of Christ is indeed an easy yoke. No words were ever more true; but the "ways" must be entered upon betimes—the "yoke" must be submitted to in youth. It seems that one could pray for an angel's eloquence, to persuade those who are just beginning life that it is so.

Once let them yield themselves to be the children of God in heart as well as by their baptismal privileges, and there is a clear, straight, sunshiny, though not cloudless path, marked out for them through the toils and dangers of the wilderness of life, to the rest of the blessed in Paradise. If any doubt, let them ask those who have gone before.

Who ever gave himself to God in the spring time of life, and repented in the dreary winter of old age? Who ever looked back upon the years gone by, and grieved that they had been devoted to his Saviour? Who ever lay upon his death-bed, eternity opening before him, and the sentence of judgment awaiting him, and did not turn with thankfulness and love unutterable, to the remembrance that, amidst all his manifold imperfections, he had been enabled, whilst his heart was yet untainted by grievous sin, to offer himself, his soul and body, to be "a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice" to the Almighty Lord, by whose death he was redeemed?

Madeline Clifford was very happy. She knew that

in one sense she could not remain so ; since trouble must sooner or later come to her, as it comes to all. Still she was very happy ; for if ever she thought of the future, she thought also of One who would never forsake her ; and what trial could overwhelm her when He was with her ?

That morning's walk was a thorough enjoyment to her ; her business was soon settled, and a short distance further brought her to the Manor lodge. No one was within except a little child, and Madeline, afraid of entrusting the book to her, considered it would be better, even at the risk of being late in returning, to carry it herself to the house. As she drew near, she caught sight of Alice, through the iron railing which separated the garden from the park, sauntering slowly up and down the terrace. Madeline called to her, and Alice's face brightened instantly, and hastening to the gate, she threw it open, and begged Madeline to join her.

"I have a book for Lady Catharine," said Madeline : "will you take it for her ? I have no time to wait, for I have done scarcely anything this morning at home, and mamma will be vexed if I am not back soon."

Alice laughed.

"Why, Madeline, one would think you were a baby in the school-room still. I thought you were out of all that particularity."

"So I am," answered Madeline, "partly ; but one wishes to please mamma just the same."

"Such trifles cannot signify," said Alice. "You make yourself as badly off as I am. What do you think now of Lady Catharine's insisting upon my walking up and down here for an hour every morning ?"

"That I wish you may never have anything more disagreeable to do," replied Madeline, with a smile,

as she gave the book to Alice, and wished her good-bye.

"Well! but tell me," said Alice, detaining her; "does your mamma treat you in the same way?"

"She wishes us to walk every morning, as you know," replied Madeline; "and we generally do before breakfast."

"That is what Lady Catharine wants me to do," said Alice; "but it does not suit me; and then she worries so."

Madeline had a strong inclination to stop and give Alice some good advice; but the church clock struck eleven.

"I must go," she exclaimed. "Alice, dear, will you let me say one thing? If you would just make up your mind to please Lady Catharine in these trifles, I think you would be happier. Good bye—give me a kiss; I dare say we shall meet again by and by."

Alice said "Good bye," in a tone of some annoyance, and could not forbear, adding, "You are so dreadfully particular and punctual, Madeline. When do you mean to get out of leading-strings?"

"Never," said Madeline, playfully, as she closed the garden gate, and once more nodding to Alice, set off on her walk home.

Alice looked wistfully after her; perplexing thoughts seemed working in her mind. She drew a note from her pocket and stood gazing upon the direction with an air of irresolution. Presently, as if suddenly determined, she threw open the iron gate and ran after Madeline, who was proceeding leisurely through the park.

Madeline heard her footsteps without knowing who was behind her. She looked round a little startled.

"You walk so fast," began Alice, nearly breathless with the haste she had made. "I thought I never should reach you."

"How tiresome of me!" exclaimed Madeline. "Dear Alice, you are quite out of breath. What is it you want?"

"Nothing particular; only a trifle," replied Alice, embarrassment succeeding to her former eagerness and irritation. "Only, just—will you take this letter to the post for me as you go by?"

"Yes, at least—to the post did you say?—it is not near post time."

"I am quite aware of that; but will you take it? I want it to go. What are you afraid of?"

"Nothing," exclaimed Madeline, a little impatiently. "I am not afraid of anything." Then, in a more subdued voice, she added, "I do not mind taking this letter, or any letter, Alice; but I cannot think why you ask it."

"I have a very good reason," said Alice. "There can be no harm in the letter; you see it is only to Florence Trevelyan." As she said this Alice held the direction for Madeline to see.

"Florence Trevelyan! there can be no harm, certainly; but, Alice, if you would not think me curious, I wish you could give me a reason for not sending the letter with the others."

"Oh, I have a very simple reason, if that is what you want," replied Alice, assuming an air of indifference. "I cannot have Lady Catharine prying into my correspondence."

"She sees your letters, then?"

"Yes, generally. There is no rule about it; but she remarks whom I write to, and rather complains if I send too many to the same person; and, in fact, I must be independent. So will you please just take my letter and put it into the post as you go by?"

Madeline made no answer. Alice held out the letter, but she did not take it.

"I thought you were immensely good-natured as well as strict," said Alice.

"I should like to be good-natured—I wish to be," answered Madeline, and the manner in which she spoke was so child-like and artless, that Alice could scarcely forbear smiling.

"Well, then, take my letter, like a darling."

"But I would rather do right than be good-natured," continued Madeline, with the same simplicity, and seeming to speak her thoughts aloud without reference to Alice's presence.

Alice looked back to the garden to be certain that she was not observed. "Come, say yes or no; be quick, Maddy."

"What I think, Alice," answered Madeline, "is that one ought not to set oneself up; I mean one ought not to go against the persons one is with—do you see?"

"No; I see nothing, except that you are amazingly absurd and provoking," exclaimed Alice.

"I would not be if I could help it, Alice; but somehow, I should not like to do anything Lady Catharine might not approve."

"Really, Madeline, you are a complete baby. Do you think that at sixteen I am going to worry myself about every trifle, by considering whether Lady Catharine would approve? At that rate I might be tormenting myself all day long. She never approves of anything. She is as particular as—as—" Alice could find no satisfactory simile, and satisfied herself by adding, "Juno!—it is a capital name for her. She is a complete Juno."

"It is the particularity I am thinking of," replied Madeline, taking no notice of the latter part of Alice's speech. "If she is so particular—"

"What then? if she is so particular—"

"Why—you must not be angry, Alice—I don't think you can quite know better than Lady Catharine; and if she is like your mamma, it seems as if you ought to obey her. Please don't vex about the

letter ; I would do anything for you I could, indeed I would ; but I don't think this would be quite right." Madeline once more said "Good bye," and was walking homewards before Alice could tell what reply to make, or what argument or reproach to use.

Alice stood gazing after her, as with a light, elastic step, she went on, neither pausing nor looking behind her, neither turning to the right hand nor to the left ; bent only on one purpose—reaching home in good time. Madeline's movements were entirely the index of her mind—free and firm, and yet child-like. They were quite different from Ruth's calmer, steadier, more thoughtful air. Alice, vexed though she was, could not help watching her with interest, in which was mingled a feeling of respect, as she threaded her way by short by-paths, amidst the intricacies of the trees, sometimes hidden, sometimes re-appearing, and at last becoming little more than a dark spot in the distance. Alice lost sight of her at last, and then she turned herself and went back to the house.

Lady Catharine met her at the iron gate. "My dear, I thought my wish was that you should not go beyond the garden."

"Madeline Clifford has just been here," replied Alice, evading an excuse. "She brought a book from the Parsonage."

"Give it me, my love, at once ; it may be of consequence."

Alice's latent ill-temper was roused by Lady Catharine's tone of command, and the half-implied reproach. She answered coldly that Madeline had not been gone many minutes, and giving the book to Lady Catharine, went to her room. Again the disappointed look might have been seen on Lady Catharine's face. She walked up and down the terrace

buried in self-examination. What was her error in Alice's education? What mistake was she committing which could thus estrange her affection? or was Alice really cold and selfish? Was it possible that the child of the gentle, affectionate Mrs. Lennox, could be insensible to all the love which was bestowed upon her? Perhaps she was too exacting, too particular; but this was only a passing fear. Lady Catharine had given up so many of her long-established habits, and had overcome so much of her natural precision in order not to be a restraint upon Alice, that it was difficult for her to imagine that anything of the kind which remained could really be galling. A different answer to the question suggested itself. Alice must need change and companionship of her own age. Ruth and Madeline could not be with her always, and Ruth was too grave and Madeline too child-like, perhaps, to suit her.

Lady Catharine disliked few things more than the idea of having the regularity of her household disturbed by an additional inmate, young and gay, and requiring amusement; yet whilst Alice sat, brooding over her fancied miseries, and tormenting herself with schemes for sending a private note to Florence Trevelyan, Lady Catharine was planning how she could arrange to receive and entertain a visitor—one of Alice's school friends, any one whom she might prefer, and whom Mrs. Carter could recommend. She resolved to write to Mrs. Carter by that day's post, and ask her opinion as to which of Alice's former companions it would be preferable to have. Florence Trevelyan might have been asked at once, but Alice appeared to have taken so little interest in her, that it seemed scarcely probable she would like it, and Lady Catharine put her aside as not to be thought of.

CHAPTER XI.

RUTH was disappointed in her hope of seeing Alice for two days. She had therefore full leisure to think over her last conversation and all that had passed between them. That Ruth had influence was clear; and she had also a sincere desire to exercise this influence rightly. Alice's increased interest in the school and the poor people were hopeful symptoms; but no external improvement could really avail for her happiness as long as her position with regard to Lady Catharine remained as it then was. Here lay the great difficulty both for Alice's conduct and Ruth's advice. Mrs. Clifford would have been the fit person to apply to when Ruth wished to know how to deal with Alice; but Ruth was involved in a harassing maze of petty perplexities. She could not pretend to talk openly to her mother about Alice, and yet be a party to deceptions. But neither could she own her share in them, because this would involve a mention of Florence and Justine; and perhaps, as Alice had said, do harm. Ruth had a strong mind, which could cope with serious evils; she had moral courage sufficient to have enabled her to make really great efforts, and she had a clear judgment in general; but the present seemed a case distinct from all others. There was a consciousness of being wrong, without any exact perception of where the wrong lay; a wish to free herself from Alice, yet a strong desire to lead her right; a dislike to being mixed up in any affair with Florence and Justine, yet a dread that if Alice were to continue the acquaintance whilst she

withdrew from it, the result might do great mischief. Above all, a hatred of deception and concealment, yet the tie of a hasty promise, given, she scarcely knew why or for what. It was the most worrying, provoking medley of small difficulties which Ruth had ever met with.

Still, if she really could guide Alice at all, it should be, she determined, in the path of sincerity: the mystery about Justine must either be cleared up, or they must be released from their promise. This step was undoubtedly one of the first to be taken, and Ruth became quite anxious either to meet Florence, or to make Alice agree to write to her; or, in short, do something to put an end to the necessity for concealment.

Alice's disposition was changeable as the winds. Before Lady Catharine received Mrs. Carter's answer to her letter, she had taken, what is called, a good turn—at least in some respects. The poor people's clothes and some books of accounts were sent from the Parsonage, and she busied herself one whole morning in arranging what was to be done with them; and even consulted Lady Catharine as to how she should manage to receive the pence for the shoe club, and what day and hour it would be well to fix for it. Lady Catharine was thankful for the improvement, but it was only external. As regarded herself,—her own thoughts, or wishes, or feelings,—Alice was as little inclined to be communicative as ever.

Mrs. Carter's letter, therefore, was very welcome when it arrived at the usual time, the breakfast hour; for Lady Catharine flattered herself that she was now to find an easy way out of her difficulties. But, like many other "short cuts" in life, the plan of providing Alice with a friend only led farther away from the main object. Mrs. Carter professed herself much perplexed what answer to give to Lady Catharine's

request. In the multiplicity of her engagements she could not always bear in mind the friendships which her young people formed with each other. She was not at all aware that either Fanny Wilson or Jessie O'Neile were particularly intimate with Alice. Indeed, to the best of her recollection, the only person whom Alice had lately expressed much regard for, was Florence Trevelyan; but of this she could not be certain. She would not, however, neglect the opportunity of giving Lady Catharine a warning upon the subject, which she was sure would not be taken amiss. And this warning made Lady Catharine knit her brows, and look doubly stern, as she pushed aside her plate, and removed her coffee cup, and seemed determined to give it her full attention; whilst Alice sat opposite, wondering what Mrs. Carter, whose handwriting she recognised, could possibly have to write about.

The passage which so engrossed Lady Catharine was the following: "I cannot help fearing lest, by any means, Alice's intimacy with Florence should lead to the renewal of an acquaintance with another young person, whose name you may perhaps recollect, Mademoiselle Le Vergnier. She was at one time admitted frequently as a guest at my house. I then saw reason to distrust her principles, and for the sake of my pupils I was compelled to forbid her ever associating with them again. Still I had an interest in her; she was very young, and her education had been much neglected. All her prospects depended upon being able to support herself as a governess; and as she had been specially recommended to my care, I could not at once, for what might be considered a trifling offence, give her up. I will not trouble you with mentioning the means I took to watch over and help her; it will be sufficient to say that I never lost sight of her, and from time to time gave her advice as to

her conduct, besides other assistance. I had reason to hope that my efforts would not be thrown away, and I looked forward to procuring some situation for her where she might be independent and respected. But some circumstances, which have lately come to my knowledge, have given me a very unfavourable impression regarding her. I fear the careless education which she received as a child is working its fatal consequences now that she is a woman. I could not possibly recommend her as a governess, and it would grieve me sincerely to know that any of my pupils were intimate with her.

"You will not, I hope, consider me prejudiced or unjust because I do not enter into particulars. I do not feel myself at liberty to give more than a general warning; but when I heard that Florence Trevelyan had been allowed to renew the acquaintance, notwithstanding a caution, similar to this, sent both to her mother and herself, I could not help feeling anxious respecting Alice. Mademoiselle Le Vergnier has lately been resident in the neighbourhood of Cromer Court. I am not sure where she now is. With regard to Florence, I have not a bad opinion of her. I even consider that, under good influence, she might do well; but she is extremely weak and very vain, and one cannot tell what the effect of Justine's acquaintance may be. It is a real grief to me that her parents have allowed an intimacy to grow up again."

A hasty person would at once have addressed Alice upon the subject of this letter, but Lady Catharine was seldom or never hasty. She finished breakfast with great deliberation, gave her orders for the day, and then went into the garden—her usual place for meditation. Alice hoped that nothing was wrong, and settled herself to her occupations in the morning-room. There was nothing very wrong yet, at least in the way of suspicion. Lady Catharine's disposi-

tion was guileless ; she did not imagine that Alice would deceive her, and therefore took it for granted that Mrs. Carter was mistaken when she supposed that Florence and Alice were friends. All that vexed her was to be obliged in any way to check the acquaintance with Florence, who, as the daughter of persons once well known to her, had, she conceived, a claim upon her for kindness. The question which she could not at once decide was, whether she should mention to Alice what Mrs. Carter had said.

The natural thing to be done in a case of difficulty is to ask another's opinion ; but this was exactly what Lady Catharine never would do. She was the lady paramount in her own household and upon her own large estate ; and though humble in her opinion of herself, as all true Christians must be, she nevertheless had an unobtrusive but firm reliance upon her own judgment, which made it seem unnecessary to ask advice. Besides, Mrs. Clifford was the only person whom she could well consult, and Mrs. Clifford, with all her excellences—and Lady Catharine thought herself fully alive to them—did not hold that position in her estimation which would fit her to be her counsellor. She was too gentle—too quiet ; her management was not systematic ; or, at any rate, it did not appear to be so. Lady Catharine, in her secret heart, believed that it was by a sort of happy accident—if such a term may be allowed—that Ruth and Madeline had grown up to be superior to other girls of their age. It was the unseen influence of religious principle, she supposed, acting by itself upon dispositions naturally good, and kept aloof from temptation. She could not understand a family in which the authority of the mother and the mistress was not prominently put forward. Mrs. Clifford, on her side, respected Lady Catharine extremely, but she was rather afraid of her. Lady Catharine's strong will

went straight forward, like the course of a rail-road, cutting down hills of difficulty, and filling up valleys of perplexity, and gaining its end surely and rapidly ; but never perceiving that it was all the time intruding upon private feeling, or invading some quiet little nook of home affections. Mrs. Clifford felt this constantly, and she would have been just as unwilling to give advice to Lady Catharine as Lady Catharine would be to ask it. Lady Catharine came to her own decision at length ; she would be silent for the present. Mrs. Carter was evidently mistaken in thinking that Alice cared for Florence, and it might be more charitable to Justine not to say anything about her until there was a necessity. In the meantime she could be on the watch herself, and check any great friendship if it appeared likely to spring up. For the sake of her old friends it would not do to discourage the acquaintance entirely ; and, indeed, Mrs. Carter's observations did not seem to render it necessary.

When Lady Catharine went to Alice's room, she referred again to her school friends, and proposed, if she liked it, to invite either Fanny Wilson or Jessie O'Neile to the Manor. Alice's answer was discouraging. She was very much obliged ; but she did not care. If Lady Catharine liked.

"If I like, my dear ; that is not at all the point : it is what you like."

"Thank you, ma'am ;" but Alice would not appear glad.

A slight misgiving crossed Lady Catharine's mind. "You are very strange, my dear," she said. "You don't seem half as much pleased as you were the other day, when you told me you had met Miss Trevelyan at Redford."

"Don't I, ma'am ?" said Alice, blushing, but going on with her occupation.

"No, my dear, you don't. Do you really not care to have your friends to see you?"

"I shall like it by and by," said Alice; not knowing how to avoid a direct answer.

"Well! by and by; perhaps you are right; you are scarcely settled in your ways of going on yet. I am glad you are diligent at that work; you will have finished the seams to-day."

"Yes, I hope so," said Alice, rejoiced to have escaped the dangerous topic.

"Neatly done, too," said Lady Catharine, examining it. "I must go now, I have letters to write. Good bye, my love, till luncheon time;" and Lady Catharine went away, pleased at being freed for a time, without any sacrifice of duty, from the necessity of entertaining a strange young lady. She came back however; the misgiving in her mind was not entirely gone. "You have seen but little of Miss Trevelyan, my dear Alice. I suppose she has never mentioned to you anything about a friend of hers, a Mademoiselle Le Vergnier?"

"I know Justine myself," said Alice.

"Yes, yes, I am aware of that; but I thought Miss Trevelyan knew her too."

"When we were at Mrs. Carter's, a long time ago," said Alice.

"Oh!" Lady Catharine was quite satisfied, and fancied she had managed cleverly to discover that Alice knew nothing of Florence or Justine, or anything concerning them.

Alice was quite dissatisfied. Those few observations had opened to her, in a great measure, the purport of Mrs. Carter's letter.

CHAPTER XII.

RUTH went to the Manor that afternoon. She found Lady Catharine in Alice's apartment, helping her to arrange some books, which had just come from London. Alice was in good humour, and Lady Catharine pleased with her pleasure. This was so much in Ruth's favour, for Alice was more likely to take a right view of things when she was contented than when she was perverse.

"Now, Ruth," said Lady Catharine, in her kindest voice; "we must have your assistance. Here are some histories; they had better go before the Waverley Novels."

"The Waverley Novels!" and Ruth laid her hand upon them eagerly. "Oh! Alice, how delightful! are they all your own?"

"All her own," replied Lady Catharine, smiling at Ruth's forgetfulness of the observation she had addressed to her. "But," she added, Alice assures me they shall not be her only reading. The histories are to be studied carefully; and the Waverley Novels are to be the recreation. For myself, I never read novels at all," continued Lady Catharine, in a lower tone. "I don't see the interest in them: however, with young people, I suppose it is different. There were not many good novels when I was young."

Ruth and Alice were now looking over the books together; pointing out to each other which they had read, and recalling the particular passages and characters they liked.

When, however, Lady Catharine left them, which

she did very soon, Ruth threw aside her volume, and exclaimed ;

"How I have wished to see you, Alice, the last three days."

"And so have I been wishing to see you," replied Alice. "I should have managed it the day before yesterday, only it rained ; and, yesterday, Lady Catharine took me out in the carriage."

"I have been very uncomfortable since I saw you last," continued Ruth.

"About that stupid note ? It is stupid, is it not ? Florence really must not write in such a very affectionate way—and hinting about Justine too !—so extremely imprudent !"

"And what is more," continued Ruth, "Florence must not have anything to do with Justine ; or, if she has, she must not mix you up with it."

"As to that," replied Alice, "I know no harm of Justine ; Florence tells me she is very well disposed."

"And besides, from what you have said," observed Ruth, "I am sure your acquaintance with Florence is kept up in some way without Lady Catharine's knowledge."

"Is Lady Catharine always to interfere with me ?" inquired Alice, proudly. "Am I never to have a friend of my own choosing ?"

"Whilst you are living with Lady Catharine, you are bound to follow her wishes," said Ruth ; "and to be open with her."

"So I would be ; but I am afraid of her."

"That may be a difficulty," replied Ruth ; "but it does not alter the duty."

"And what would you have me to do then ?" inquired Alice, struck with Ruth's determined tone.

"Write to Florence, and say that you must tell Lady Catharine how intimate you are."

"Oh! but you mistake entirely: it is my own fault, Lady Catharine's not understanding that she is my friend. Florence has nothing to do with it; and really the affair is scarcely worth speaking of, only it perplexes one just now. I hope you will try and understand, Ruth," continued Alice, after a moment's pause. "You will not think I meant to be insincere; but the fact is, Lady Catharine worries me immensely, and I knew she would not like Florence—at least, I thought she would not; and when she asked who were my friends at school, I did not mention her particularly; and so Lady Catharine has taken up a fancy that I do not care about her—that Fanny Wilson and Jessie O'Neile were my favourites; and, moreover,—I don't much like telling you, because you take matters so seriously, but I suppose I had better;—one day there came a letter from Florence—a formal one, just such as she writes when she is stupid—and I did not mind showing that; but there was a postscript, much warmer, calling me 'darling,' and all that sort of thing, and this I was afraid to show; so I gave Lady Catharine the letter, and kept the postscript, and ever since she has taken it into her head, I am sure, that Florence always writes to me in that dull way, and she would not at all comprehend the style of these last notes."

Ruth was silent when Alice had finished this confession, which was made in a hurried voice, and with downcast eyes. Alice waited patiently for an answer. When it came it was very short, and not at all consolatory.

"Alice, Mrs. Carter always said your great fault was deficiency in moral courage."

"Yes, I know it—I know it perfectly," answered Alice; "but that will not help me now."

"It ought to help you," said Ruth, "because you ought to strive against it."

"And I mean to do so ; I trust and think that I shall. Only let me get rid of this one difficulty."

"You create the difficulties for yourself, Alice," answered Ruth ; "and unless you have moral courage now, neither I nor any one else can be of use to you. You must tell Lady Catharine what you have done."

"I tell her!" and Alice almost screamed with horror.

"Yes ; it is the only way," said Ruth, unrelentingly.

Alice turned very pale ; then, after a moment's thought, she said :

"No, Ruth, it is not the only way ;—in fact, I cannot do it ;—for, of course, if I tell one thing, I must tell all. It would be merely pretence to keep back anything ; and what is to be done then about Justine ?—we have both promised to be secret there."

Ruth was silent, for she was perplexed.

"Then write to Florence," she said, after a little thought ; "tell her that you would rather not keep up a correspondence with her, as there are subjects which cannot be mentioned to Lady Catharine, and so break off the acquaintance—for the present at least ; and you may beg her to release us from our promise at the same time. In fact, as far as I am concerned, I am scarcely bound by it—for I only made it for a time."

"And how is this precious letter to be sent when it is written ?"

"As all other letters are," I suppose, replied Ruth.

"And if Lady Catharine asks to see it ?"

Ruth was again obliged to consider.

"You must tell the truth," she replied : "say that you have written something private to Florence. Lady Catharine is much too honourable to insist upon seeing it, however annoyed she may be ; and

depend upon it, Alice," continued Ruth, earnestly, "if you will do this, you will go further in gaining Lady Catharine's esteem, and making your life happy, than you can possibly imagine."

Alice leant her head upon her hand, and thought; and Ruth busied herself with the books, that no fault might be laid upon them when Lady Catharine returned. Alice looked up at last.

"Ruth," she said, "if Lady Catharine were any one else, I could do it; but you don't know her. I can't tell you what it is like when she is offended. She never scolds, but it is something awful,—a thunder cloud is nothing to it;—so black and quiet, only you are sure there must be a burst before long. And then her voice goes deep down with a rumble, and she has a fashion of smoothing her mittens; when she begins that, I know it is all over with me."

Alice paused; the small amount of courage which she possessed before she commenced her description had now completely melted away.

"You must think of another plan," she continued; "I can't stand thundering looks."

"Or seeing Lady Catharine smooth her mittens," said Ruth, ironically. "Oh, Alice!"

"It is very well for you to say 'Oh, Alice!' but you will not be put in the way of it."

"What I say is right, nevertheless," persisted Ruth.

"Well! yes, perhaps it is."

"Then it must be done."

Alice was silent.

"Think, Alice," continued Ruth; "now you are to be confirmed, you ought to be so very particular."

"Confirmed!" exclaimed Alice. "I wish—" she stopped.

"You wish, what?" asked Ruth.

"I had better keep my wishes to myself," replied

Alice; "I shall only frighten you. By the by, Ruth, are we to have regular examination days now? Your papa said something about it."

"Yes: I thought you understood it; twice a week, to begin to-morrow."

Alice looked anything but pleased, and Ruth resolutely returned to the former subject.

"You see, Alice," she said, "this is a time of all others when you should be careful. You would not bear to promise to be good, and all the time to be deceiving Lady Catharine. I do hope you will take my advice."

"I mean to do so always, after this time," said Alice.

"But that will not do; now is the time; really it is right."

Alice put on a mysterious expression of face, and said she could not be sure of that.

"But I am, quite," replied Ruth.

"Yes; but you don't know. Suppose, by telling Lady Catharine, or by making her suspicious,—which she would be horribly,—if she knew I wrote private things to Florence,—great mischief was to follow for another person."

"I don't understand—I can't tell what you are talking about," replied Ruth. "I only see the straightforward right of the case."

"Ah! yes; but if I were to explain—there are some things, Ruth, which you are not up to."

"A great many, I hope," said Ruth, proudly, "if you are talking of Florence and Justine."

"That is so like you, Ruth; setting them both down as very bad now, because they were silly years ago. But there is nothing silly in this business; it is very important, especially to Justine. I wish I could tell you. However, you will know soon enough if things turn out as we wish. Florence really is

amazingly good-natured to take such an interest in Justine."

Ruth could not help being curious. Her mind wandered away from the real subject under discussion, whilst trying to give a form to the conjectures which crossed her mind.

"I know—I have guessed," she presently exclaimed. "Mamma heard the other day that Mrs. De Lacy was looking out for a governess for little Agnes. Florence wishes Justine to have the situation; that is it. I don't ask you to tell, but I am sure it is. I suppose she would not like the old stories to be brought up against her. But it seems to me absurd to make a mystery of things so long past, and Mrs. De Lacy must find out somehow that Mrs. Carter knows Justine."

"Mrs. De Lacy is going abroad almost immediately," said Alice.

Ruth smiled at this indirect confirmation of her suspicion.

"And Justine is to go with her?" she said.

"And perhaps Florence," added Alice; then recollecting herself, she exclaimed: "How stupid in me! I did not mean in the least to tell."

"Only you have done so. You never could keep a secret."

Alice appeared disconcerted for the instant, but there was relief in the thought that Ruth now knew something of the true state of the case.

"Still I cannot comprehend it," continued Ruth. "Mrs. Carter is a very kind, charitable person. She would not say anything against Justine if she could help it."

"Mrs. Carter is prejudiced," replied Alice.

"But how prejudiced? Has she made up her mind that because Justine was not perfectly good years ago, therefore she is to be wicked all the days of her life?"

"Mrs. Carter says unjust things about her, and believes a great many false stories," said Alice.

"Oh!" and Ruth's face brightened with intelligence, "I comprehend better now; they are new stories, which Florence is afraid of."

"New, but not true," said Alice. "Florence told me all about it. Justine's last situation was a very strict one, and she was never allowed to go out or see her friends; and Mrs. Carter, and persons who don't like her, declare that she used to do so by stealth, but it was not at all the case. Justine explained it to Florence very satisfactorily, and since then Florence has taken her part. As for Mrs. Carter, she is quite Justine's enemy, and I suspect she has even written something about her to Lady Catharine." Alice then related what had passed in the morning. "Florence told me that even Mary Vernon has interfered about her," she added, "saying ill-natured things."

"Mrs. Carter and Mary Vernon!" exclaimed Ruth; "I would believe what they said against all the Florence Trevelyans in the world. I shall write to Mary and ask her what the truth is."

"No, no, indeed Ruth you must not. Remember, we have promised to be quiet; and, in fact, I ought not to have told you this, only you guessed. In fairness to me you must not make a fuss."

"But it is so wrong in Florence," said Ruth, "setting up her judgment! And if Justine is really not a good person, it will be very sad for her to be governess to that child. I wonder why you don't see that."

"Florence declares she is good," persisted Alice.

"But how can Florence know better than such persons as Mrs. Carter and Mary Vernon? Indeed she is quite wrong."

"Then write and tell her so," said Alice, eagerly.

"I! I write?"

"Yes, you have influence; she respects you immensely. Tell her how you came to know about the affair, and advise her to have nothing to do with it. She will listen to you."

"No," exclaimed Ruth, "Florence will not do that; she will listen to nothing but her own wishes."

"Ruth," said Alice, "I know Florence much better than you do; she will listen to you."

Ruth became very thoughtful.

"I cannot mix myself up with the affair," she said.

"But you are mixed up with it; remember your promise."

"It was given only for a short time; I shall let Florence know the next time we meet that I consider myself released from it; and then the matter must take its own course. If I am asked anything about Justine, I shall tell what I know."

Alice grew uneasy, and said it was a very perplexing business.

"I do not see that," replied Ruth; "we have but one thing to do—to get out of it."

"Much easier said than done—at least for me," observed Alice; "and, moreover, I cannot see that it is best."

"It is the simplest, most straightforward course," replied Ruth.

"Well, it may be," answered Alice, doubtfully. "You are much better and wiser than I am, Ruth; but really, in this case, I do think you are mistaken. Just consider: if it is so very bad for Justine to be governess to Agnes when she is not fit for the situation, surely it would be proper to warn Florence against encouraging her. You may do immense good if you will only write, and you may tell Florence not to send me any more affectionate letters, which I

cannot show to Lady Catharine, and so prevent me from getting into disgrace."

Alice had, by this time, completely deceived herself. She really did think that she was giving a disinterested opinion when she was urging Ruth to do that which would best suit her own convenience. Ruth again brought forward, though rather feebly, her opinion of the uselessness of interference, and Alice strongly combated it, and reiterated again and again her conviction that the profound respect which Florence entertained for Ruth would lead her to be entirely guided by her.

"If I could think so," said Ruth, hesitating.

"But you may be quite sure of it; you may be of use to Florence, and possibly to Justine too. Both of them look up to you."

Ruth smiled at the notion of a person like Justine looking up to her; but the idea had its effect.

"And," continued Alice, "your writing will stop Florence from sending those foolish affectionate notes just as much as mine; but nothing which I could say would prevent her from encouraging Justine, don't you see?"

Alice had mixed up the two questions adroitly, though without any deliberate intention, and Ruth's usually clear judgment was at fault. She lost sight of her first wish of inducing Alice to be open with Lady Catharine, and began to imagine that the important point was to persuade Florence that she was doing wrong in taking Justine's part.

"I will think about it," she said, in reply to Alice's pleading.

"If you think, you will do it," was the answer: one which made Ruth shrink with a sudden misgiving, as to whether she was deciding aright. Alice used the expression without any double meaning; it

was merely her way of saying that she was certain Ruth would agree.

"I know you will, because it is best, and kindest," she added. "You are more reasonable than Madeline."

"Madeline knows nothing!" exclaimed Ruth.

"No; only I meant to have told you—the other day—I had written a note to Florence—much such a one as you will send in one respect, begging her not to call me 'darling, and dearest;' and I asked Madeline to put it in the post for me and she refused."

"You never told me that before," said Ruth, reproachfully.

"Because I did not think of it. I was angry with Madeline at the time, but I forgot it afterwards."

"And Madeline refused?" repeated Ruth, in a tone of uneasiness.

Alice answered with some surprise:—

"Yes, she refused; but why should you be so grave about it?"

"Madeline thought it wrong, I suppose," continued Ruth.

"I don't know about wrong exactly; that is such a hard word, but not quite right. 'She had rather not,' she said; and when Madeline talks about rather not, I can never ask her a second time."

"Good bye, Alice," said Ruth, abruptly; and fastening the strings of her bonnet in haste.

"Good bye, Ruth, dear; remember, I depend upon you, and you must write soon, or it will be no good."

Ruth's letter to Florence *was* written that same afternoon. Any one in the least acquainted with human nature, especially with a character like Ruth's, might have prophesied that it would be.

Ruth piqued herself upon her good judgment;

but a good judgment, in questions of right and wrong, is not that which can calculate consequences cleverly, but that which perceives the duty of the case and determines at once to perform it. Its main ingredient is more than a wish not to do wrong ; it is an earnest desire to do right. Ruth had two duties incumbent upon her ; one to her mother not to engage in a correspondence which she might disapprove ; the other to Alice, not in any way to encourage her in deceiving Lady Catharine. These two duties Ruth set aside, and took up a third ; the endeavour to make Florence Trevelyan give up Justine.

Alice's allusion to Madeline was the only thing which caused her to question the propriety of what she was doing. Ruth was nearly certain, though she would scarcely allow it to herself, that Madeline would not take the same view of the case that she did. But Madeline was young, even for her age ; and singularly quick too in settling all doubtful questions. Ruth was accustomed to consider her sister's opinions as inferior to her own when they differed in argument. She herself was very clever ; her perception was keen, and she seemed able to see both sides of the question at once. Whichever view she took, appeared, for the time, the right one ; yet, after long reasoning, Madeline would often surprise her by ending with : " It seems right, Ruth, because you say it ; but, somehow, I cannot feel that it is so ; " and then she would return to the very point from which they had started, and propound some simple question of duty, which put all Ruth's cleverness to flight. Experience, in these cases, often showed Ruth that Madeline was right, but she attributed the fact to accident.

The doubt, in the present instance, as to what Madeline would do in a similar case, made Ruth uncomfortable, but it did not alter her decision.

As Alice had prophesied, she thought; and then she resolved to act.

The letter, when written, was read over with considerable satisfaction, for it was well expressed, simple and forcible. Ruth made many apologies for intruding her opinion, and trusted that Florence would not be vexed at her having discovered the purport of Justine's visit; and then she gave the reasons which made her think that it would not be right to conceal Justine's acquaintance with Mrs. Carter, speaking strongly of the mischief which might ensue if Justine were not a proper person to take charge of Agnes. As regarded herself, she stated that she could not consider her promise as any longer binding, for it was made before she knew the facts of the case; and when it was given she had said it could only be for a time. In conclusion, she mentioned that Alice did not like to receive notes which could not be shown to Lady Catharine, and therefore begged Florence not to write to her about Justine and to use less affectionate expressions.

This last sentence did not imply all that Ruth intended when she talked to Alice. It left the door open for the intimacy with Florence still to continue in a covert way, but she did not exactly know what else to say without giving offence, and thought that it would do for the present. Florence was not going to live in the neighbourhood, so perhaps there was no great mischief in letting things take their chance for a few weeks. In fact, she and Alice were in a manner one in this business, and if they were cut off from Florence entirely, it would of course be impossible to be of any use to her. So the letter was sent, and Ruth looked forward with much interest to the answer.

CHAPTER XIII.

ALICE was more competent to perform her duties at the school after receiving Ruth's advice and hints. She was also happier after having acknowledged her deception and determined to have no more letters which she was afraid to show. She began to fancy that she really was, as the expression is, turning over a new leaf. But Alice was mistaken. We cannot slur over a duty and go on well without performing it. If there is any act which we ought to do and which we will not do, it is in vain to flatter ourselves that we are sincere in our amendment.

Alice's concealment from Lady Catharine of her friendship with Florence Trevelyan was like an unpaid debt. Her accounts might be settled regularly for the future, but until the old claim was discharged, she could not be free and honourable. There were times when Alice felt this—when a pang shot through her heart—a pang which all must sometimes feel who endeavour to blind themselves by an outward change of conduct without seeking the conversion of the heart. These times were whenever any allusion was made to the Confirmation.

Alice could not bring herself to bear the prospect of it. As it approached nearer, it became more serious : it may indeed be said more awful ; for upon confirmation must immediately follow that holiest of Christian privileges, which the most indifferent shrink from approaching unprepared.

This was a subject rarely alluded to by Lady Catharine, who considered that if Alice was fit for

confirmation, she must be fit to be admitted to the Holy Communion, and trusted much to her late improvement; not doubting also that Alice's serious impressions would be deepened by Mr. Clifford's instruction and advice.

Perhaps, had Lady Catharine remarked the manner in which Mrs. Clifford would occasionally allude, in conversation with her children, to the solemn time that was approaching, she might have received a useful hint as to her treatment of Alice. Lady Catharine had a great dislike to enthusiastic expressions, and found it difficult to say what she felt upon religious subjects; she therefore took refuge in silence. Mrs. Clifford's taste was very like Lady Catharine's; but when, in answer to Madeline's simple observation—"Mamma, I shall not feel a child any longer when I am confirmed," her mother answered in a manner so serious that it could not be misunderstood—"And you will not be a child, my love," both Madeline and Ruth knew at once what it was to which reference was made. Volumes of instruction would not have made more impression upon them than the belief which their mother indirectly but constantly showed, that they were approaching a period when a blessing, which human language cannot describe, was to be conferred upon them.

Long before, indeed, they could have told in words the nature of the Holy Sacrament to which they were to be admitted; but words too often are a hindrance rather than an assistance to our feelings; and preparation for a first Communion is something widely different from the weekly repetition of the explanation of the subject given in the Church Catechism.

So Madeline felt as she was spending some time alone, a few days after Ruth had sent her letter to Florence. She was trying to examine her own heart; trying to discover her faults; trying to realize her

true condition upon earth, and the state of her preparation for heaven. A little book upon self-examination lay open before her. It contained but few questions ; and those, it would have seemed, soon answered. But each question suggested to Madeline's true and most conscientious mind subject for reflection and deep regret. The life which to others appeared unspotted, was, when viewed in the presence of God, stained with innumerable sins.

But Madeline would not shrink from the sight. One by one, the faults of which she was conscious from former self-examination were enumerated and confessed, with a fervent prayer for forgiveness and help ; and then, the particular point upon which she had fixed for that day's inquiry was dwelt upon more minutely. It was vanity—a fault which Madeline saw in herself, although those who knew her best would have hesitated to acknowledge that she had it. She was vain of her personal appearance, and she began her self-imposed task by examining in what details this defect showed itself. Too much time, she knew, was spent in dressing : that was one sign ; she was too particular in choosing her dresses ; too anxious to hear remarks made upon herself and Ruth, which indirectly paid them compliments ; she always observed carefully what other persons wore, and how it was put on ; she was not pleased when others were called pretty : that approached to envy ; but the ground-work was vanity. These things were indeed in themselves slight ; but they were indications of a temper of mind to be guarded against, and Madeline had learned to look, not at her outward conduct only, but at her heart. When the offence was thus thoroughly perceived and acknowledged, the next step of importance was to see it in its true light—in its real deformity ; to view it as it must be viewed by God. Madeline was vain of her appear-

ance and fond of admiration in general ; yet, in a few years (so she had been taught always to carry on her thoughts to the end of life) her body must be laid in the grave, an object of dread to those who most loved her, with the worm spread under her, and the worm covering her. Where would then be room for vanity ?

She thought once more :—there was a world, sinless and glorious, where saints cast their crowns of glory at the foot of the throne of God, and angels cover their faces with their wings in awful adoration of His Majesty. Madeline tried but for a few moments to imagine what that world must be. She read of it in the Bible, and strove to bring before the eye of her mind some faint perception of its awfulness. She imagined herself standing amongst the hosts of Heaven ; she, the ignorant, and weak, and vain—how would they feel towards her ? How would they bear her presence ? More than all, how would her merciful Saviour regard her ? The Holy and Undeiled, how could He look upon the guilty ? Vanity in heaven ! Even to connect the ideas seemed a profanation. No, it must be striven against—crushed, uprooted. Were it to cost the labour of a life, and the watchfulness of every hour, still it must be conquered. Amongst the many sacrifices of pleasant sins to be made at the altar of her Saviour, vanity must unhesitatingly be numbered.

The consciousness of perfect sincerity, blended with the depth of Madeline's repentance and humility, and with the confidence of a child asking help from a father, and the simple, reverent love of a sister trusting to an elder brother, she knelt once more in prayer, and felt that prayer was happiness. Then, as she rose to return to her usual employments, she dwelt for a few moments longer upon the probable temptations which would be awaiting her, especially

with regard to this one fault. It was not often that she left her room without casting one look in her glass, as much from habit, perhaps, as from vanity. Now she turned away, not because it would be wrong to look, but because it was the first little opportunity which presented itself of proving her own sincerity; and the trifling act, scarcely to be termed self-denial, was the seal of her resolution and the earnest of future victories.

Ruth spent some time, also, that day in self-examination; but she could not fix her mind like Madeline. The expectation of the answer from Florence Trevelyan was constantly recurring to her; and she found herself repeating the very words in which she supposed Florence would express a willingness to be entirely guided by her. It was rather surprising that she had not heard before; and an uncomfortable feeling arose at the thought that, for the first time, she should receive a letter which she must ask her mother not to read. Still Ruth began the task which she had imposed upon herself without being exactly conscious of what is called unreality; or, in other words, without seeing that she was keeping back from any known duty.

Ruth's mode of self-examination differed from Madeline's. It had respect to the future more than the past. When persons have long accustomed themselves to strictness of life, this may be a desirable mode of striving to improve. It is not well to think too much about our own minds, or even about our motives. It is better to dwell upon our Saviour's infinite love, and our own privileges as members of His church; and then to try and shew our gratitude by thinking of all we can do to please Him. But, at certain times, especially whilst we are as yet unacquainted with our own dispositions, and must endeavour to become thoroughly humbled as a prepara-

tion for the Holy Communion, it is absolutely necessary to examine our consciences very closely; to look back upon the past, that we may learn to guard against the future. Ruth thought that she had done this, because on a former occasion she had read through and answered a certain set of questions; and now, like Madeline, she chose, as her papa had recommended, one particular fault to guard against. Madeline, as we have seen, began by a careful inquiry as to the little ways in which her defects showed themselves. Ruth, on the contrary, was satisfied with knowing, partly from having been told, and partly from her own conscience, that she had certain faults; and there the inquiry rested. Her self-examination was vague: what was gone by was in a manner forgotten; and her character was, in consequence, never truly viewed. So, in the present instance, self-conceit in general was, she well knew, what she had to struggle against; and she resolved not to speak of herself, not to put forward her opinion more than could be helped; to remember generally that self-conceit was wrong: and they were very good resolutions; but if we do not know the instances in which we have before failed, we cannot tell what we are bound to guard against. Neither were they resolutions founded upon Christian humility—a heathen might have made them. There was no remembrance of the lowliness of the Saviour of the world, no consideration of His perfect purity, no real desire to be humble, because so she might be like Him. Ruth strove against her faults more because they lowered her in the eyes of her fellow-creatures, than because they were hateful in the eye of God; and when we look at our sins only in this way we never have a true view of them. Nothing will give us a real feeling of unworthiness, but the consideration of our Saviour's perfection and yet of his un-

speakeable love; and nothing will really enable us thoroughly to root out sin except the wish to please Him, as we would wish to please our parents, and the certainty that He will accept the very least endeavour, and forgive our fallings away, even until seventy times seven.

Madeline's efforts were a pleasure, Ruth's were a burden; yet Madeline had a much greater sense of her own helplessness and guilt than her sister. The one thought of her Saviour, the other of herself.

Madeline returned to the duties of her daily life with the feeling of love urging her to watchfulness and energy. Ruth returned to hers, with the thought that she had done what was right, and was, therefore, better prepared for confirmation and the Holy Communion.

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. CLIFFORD was sitting in the school-room the next morning, whilst Ruth and Madeline were pursuing their usual studies. Ruth was painfully conscious of her mother's presence, and this feeling was quite new to her. For the last year, or even more, any sense of restraint with her mamma had been wearing off. Mrs. Clifford, notwithstanding her extreme gentleness of temper, exercised a full authority over her children when they were little. Even a look of disobedience was noticed, if not punished. Ruth and Madeline would no more have ventured to disobey their mother than their father. They could not recollect the time when they had been permitted to follow their own will, and obedience, in consequence, had become as much a habit as the common course of their daily life.

When this principle was once firmly fixed, half the difficulty of education was over. Mrs. Clifford could afford to be indulgent, because she had no fear of rebellion. She could overlook many little faults which it might have fretted her children's temper to remark,—faults shown in play hours,—when they were off their guard,—when they were evidently not aware that she was near, because she knew that the great principle of duty was thoroughly rooted; and that, by degrees, if only she could have patience, it would work out its good effects in every little detail.

Ruth and Madeline scarcely knew how much they were under control, even when they were children; they were like well-trained horses, taught to attend

so immediately to the slightest check, that the curb was unnecessary ; and now that they were approaching an age when they might be expected to have judgment and wills of their own, even the restraints of childhood were gradually loosened.

Madeline was once asked, what her mamma did with them now they were growing up. The reply was rather abrupt, but perfectly true : " She lets us alone." In this " letting alone " lay the great secret of Mrs. Clifford's influence. The watchfulness exercised was never seen ; she guarded them, indeed, from evil books, evil companions, evil sights and associations ; but it was not by prohibition, but by an unnoticed care, which kept such things out of their way. Within certain limits Madeline and Ruth were perfectly free. They might walk where they liked, and when they liked ; they might choose their own reading ; write to their own friends ; have secrets between themselves, if they desired it ; spend their allowance according to their own will ; and, when surprise was sometimes expressed that Mrs. Clifford could trust them with so much liberty, she replied, " They were kept very strictly when they were quite children ; they were never allowed then to disobey, and now they have lost the inclination." And it was true ; they had lost the inclination, for their mother's tastes and wishes were their own. What inducement, for instance, could there be to peruse books privately, when their chief delight was to go to their mother with their favourite passages, and find in her interest an increase of their own enjoyment. Ruth sometimes came into the room absorbed in some poem or tale, and anxious that Madeline should read it also ; but, if Mrs. Clifford was present, and Madeline away, her natural exclamation was, " Oh ! there is mamma, that will do just as well ;" and Mrs. Clifford would stop and listen, and make her remarks, as if she

could entirely enter into her child's enthusiasm ; and if the thought crossed her mind, that Ruth might be better employed in some other way, the advice was stopped for that moment. Confidence and affection would do more, she knew, in forming a character to good than reading history ; and in the course of a few days she would perhaps talk to Ruth upon some more serious subject, which she was studying herself, and so to lead her to begin it ; in order, as Ruth expressed it, to be " reading the same book as mamma."

A similar principle was carried out in other ways. Mrs. Clifford was anxious to be the friend of her children. As a first step towards attaining this object, she allowed them to be friends to each other. With a difference of age, there must of necessity be a certain difference of feeling. Many little things they might be able to say between themselves, which they would consider almost too trifling for her. This feeling would lessen as they grew older, but at present it was unavoidable, and Mrs. Clifford gave it full scope. Madeline often said without hesitation : " Mamma, Ruth and I have a little secret together ;" and the remark was to Mrs. Clifford a greater assurance of unreserve and simplicity of mind than any confidence given directly to herself. The age which Ruth and Madeline had attained was just that when restraint was most likely to spring up between themselves and those who had authority over them. Their judgments and general character were not sufficiently fixed to enable them to be their mother's companion in her daily anxieties ; whilst the spirit of independence was naturally gaining strength, and their opinions upon all subjects were rapidly forming.

Mrs. Clifford was, however, prepared for this stage in her children's life. She was thoroughly endued with the charity which " beareth and endureth all things," and the faith which can trust the best and

most cherished wishes of our hearts in the hands of God. The difference between Ruth and Madeline was as clear to her as to her husband, perhaps even more so; for it was shown in the little instances which came more immediately under her notice; and now it was no secret to her that something was wrong in Ruth's mind, yet she waited patiently till the time when Ruth's confidence should be willingly given; and the only change in her manner was an increased tenderness—a winning consideration and care, which Ruth felt, though she could not account for it. She began to long for the answer from Florence more and more, that she might consider herself released from her promise, and speak to her mamma without reserve.

This wish was strongly on her mind when, on the morning before mentioned, a servant on horseback rode up to the Parsonage gate.

"From Sheldon, I am sure," exclaimed Madeline, going to the window. "I know that bright scarlet livery so well. Don't you remember, mamma, we used to wonder whose it could be before we knew Mrs. De Lacy?"

"I suppose the pic-nic is to be fixed," said Ruth. "The weather is just settled enough, if it will only continue."

Madeline became suddenly grave. "I don't think I want it to be fixed," she said.

Ruth's head was bent over her writing-desk, but she looked up at this speech. "Maddy, what do you mean?—why not?"

"I don't know—that is, I can't say; but I do not want it."

Ruth went on writing, but her pen moved unsteadily. The door opened, and a note was brought in. Ruth did not raise her eyes.

"It is from Mrs. De Lacy," said Mrs. Clifford,

"and about the pic-nic. It is fixed for Tuesday week; and, my dear Ruth, here are a few lines at the end for you from Miss Trevelyan."

Ruth put out her hand eagerly; but she had no fear that her mamma had read what Florence might have written.


"May I see?" said Madeline, coming to look over her.

Ruth drew back pettishly. "Let me read it myself, Maddy." She glanced her eye in an instant over the few lines, written on coloured paper prettily embossed. "There is nothing in it," she exclaimed, tossing the note across the table to her sister.

Madeline read it more attentively. "It is a very pressing invitation," she replied when she had finished.

"Yes, very." Ruth said no more, and a few minutes after left her writing and went to walk in the garden by herself.

And this was all the answer to her letter! An invitation which placed her in a greater difficulty than ever. "You *must come*," Florence wrote, with two or three dashes. Very meaning dashes they were to Ruth's eye, implying much more than a mere wish to see her. Ruth was extremely annoyed; it was such a tantalizing, irritating mode of proceeding. And there would scarcely be any use in writing again. Florence was always inclined to be obstinate, and if she had determined upon not giving an answer till they met, no entreaties would be of any avail. In this dilemma Ruth thought of speaking to her mamma. She certainly considered herself in a measure freed from the promise of secrecy. It had been given but for a short time, and she had warned Florence that it must now be at an end. Her mamma's advice would, she knew, be most valuable.



Mrs. Clifford would see at once whether it could be right any longer to keep Justine's secret—and if she could in honour go to her for help, it certainly appeared the right course. But Ruth began to reason—perhaps it would make Florence angry if she were to do so; perhaps it would break off their acquaintance; perhaps she should have no opportunity of talking seriously to her, and Florence might still go on encouraging Justine—that would be very bad for her—or she might still contrive in some way that Mrs. De Lacy should engage Justine as a governess for Agnes—that would be very bad for Agnes. There were a great many dangerous possibilities—all to be avoided, if Ruth could only see Florence and convince her that she was wrong. At last Ruth magnanimously made up her mind to act the martyr, and say nothing to her mamma—to sacrifice herself, in fact, for her friend, and swerve a little from her own duty in the hope of bringing Florence to a sense of hers.

When Ruth went back to the school-room she found Madeline looking very thoughtful, with a book before her, but evidently not reading. Once or twice she seemed inclined to speak, but to be afraid. After a time, however, she said, with an effort, "Ruth, about the pic-nic—do you mean—that is, do you think it would signify if I were not to go?"

"Signify, Maddy! What are you talking of?"

"Would there be any harm?" continued Madeline.

"My dear Maddy, you must be dreaming. No, of course, there would not be any harm; but why possibly should you not go?"

"I think I would rather not, replied Madeline, whilst the colour mounted to her cheeks; because it might be harm to me. You know, Ruth, I am not good, and I think about things so. When I am going anywhere it is always in my mind; and just now I would rather not."

Ruth understood in an instant that Madeline alluded to the Confirmation. "You had better talk to mamma," she said.

"Yes, if I can; I shall by and by."

"It will be very awkward," was Ruth's next observation, to which Madeline said nothing, and both were silent.

Ruth was almost angry with Madeline for this reserve, though she did not at all desire to talk herself upon the subject which she knew was occupying her sister's thoughts. Several times lately when the pic-nic had been referred to, Madeline had hinted a disinclination to go: but Ruth fancied it was only because she did not like the prospect of encountering a large party. Now she saw that it was a much deeper feeling. Ruth did not sympathize with her sister. Since the pic-nic had been first proposed her mind had been so occupied that she had scarcely remembered it was to take place; and now there seemed a necessity for going. If she did not, there might be no opportunity of seeing Florence Trevelyan. And then Ruth thought to herself, "Mamma and papa do not object, and why should I?" When Ruth wished to decide for herself upon any occasion, she was in the habit of saying, that now she was growing up it must be better to exercise a little judgment of her own. In this instance the case happened to be reversed, and it suited her to give up her own judgment. But Ruth did not know that her papa and mamma saw no objection. In fact, she had reason to imagine they might do so; for once or twice lately Mrs. Clifford had regretted that if the pic-nic were delayed, it would bring it near the time of the Confirmation; and this morning she had not shown any pleasure in the thought of their amusement, and, indeed, had not made any remark about it. These might have been suspicious circumstances, if Ruth had fairly considered them.

CHAPTER XV.

THE evening came; Ruth grew more vexed and unhappy about everything. Madeline's reserve—the stupidity of Florence—the pic-nic, which she did not care for, and yet to which she must go. Ruth was not generally cross; but this evening nothing pleased her. It began to rain, and instead of taking a walk, as they often did at that time when the day had been very warm, she was obliged to find employment within doors. Madeline read, and Ruth knew by the binding that the book was a volume of sermons. This made her more cross. Madeline might just as well, she thought, read sermons in her own room; but the next minute Madeline called to her to point out something which she particularly liked, and her sunny smile, and simple cheerful voice, soothed Ruth's ruffled temper. She felt that Maddy might do anything she liked—read, or talk, or be silent—it did not signify. No one could be annoyed with her. Madeline did not read her sermon with a fixed attention. She looked often out of the window, as if watching for some one. Presently the little green gate opening from the garden into the lane was swung to, and Mr. Clifford came up the gravel walk to the house. Madeline turned again to her book; but when her papa came in she closed it, and began talking upon indifferent subjects. Ruth was silent, which was rather unusual for her when parish matters were discussed, as she generally took a most active part in them. Madeline's nervous manner was apparent to her; it showed that her heart was not

interested in what was said, and when, as Mr. Clifford was going out of the room, Madeline asked whether she might say a few words to him alone, Ruth knew well what the subject of the conversation would be. A seed of uneasiness was implanted in Ruth's breast. She said to herself that Madeline was over scrupulous, but in her heart she felt that she might be right.

The study door closed, and Mr. Clifford inquired what Madeline had to say. Almost every one's heart beats quicker at such a question. Madeline's beat very fast; but nothing was to be gained by delay, so she began at once—"Papa, I wanted to speak to you—about—I don't know whether it is right; but, if you please, could you tell me about Mrs. De Lacy's invitation?"

Mr. Clifford looked half surprised, half amused. He had not even heard of it that day.

"The pic-nic, papa," continued Madeline.

"Well, my love, the pic-nic—what is your difficulty? Does your mamma wish you not to go to it?"

"I don't know; she has not said so. But, papa, would it be wrong to stay away?"

"Certainly not, if you wish to do so—at least I should imagine not. But why should you?" Mr. Clifford looked at Madeline, and by the expression of her face guessed what she would answer. "Would you really rather not go?" he continued.

"I think it would be better—safer for me," and Madeline's face brightened at the hope of being understood. "You know, papa, I think of things so—they run in my head; and I should enjoy this so much—that is, if we go to St. Cuthbert's Castle, and Ruth says that was the place mentioned."

Mr. Clifford considered before he replied; then he said, "Was this your own idea, my love?"

"Yes, quite my own."

"And has it only entered your head to-day?"

"I have thought about it a little before, but not so much, because it did not seem as if the time ever would be fixed."

"And what does Ruth think?" inquired Mr. Clifford.

"That is one thing which worries me," exclaimed Madeline. "I am afraid Ruth will not go without me, and I could not bear her to be disappointed. What shall I do?—what can I do to be right?" she added, in a very anxious tone.

"We will think, my dear child," answered her father, and as he said this he kissed her with a tenderness of manner which fully repaid Madeline for the effort she had made in speaking to him. "First of all we must remember that we may make mistakes in matters of conscience by being too scrupulous; by looking upon God, I mean, as a hard taskmaster. I do not say that you do so now—indeed, it is most likely I shall quite enter into your notions—but religion is meant to hallow our innocent amusements, not to shut us out from them; therefore it is not because you expect a good deal of pleasure from going to St. Cuthbert's that you should be alarmed, and imagine it may do you harm."

"I should like it very much indeed," said Madeline, laying a stress upon the last word.

"Yes, and you were intended to like it very much indeed. Going with pleasant companions to a place you have heard a good deal about must be very agreeable. But God will not be angry with you for finding it so."

"Not if I think about it very much?" said Madeline.

"No, not in general. It is right, we know, to govern our thoughts, and not to let them dwell upon

any subject at wrong times, or so as to make us forget our duties; but this is a very hard lesson—perhaps it may take us many years to learn it—and we may be sure that God will be mercifully patient with us whilst we are learning it—supposing, I mean, that we are trying to do so. He will not expect us to be perfect at once.”

“But just now?” said Madeline.

“Ah! that is the question,” answered Mr. Clifford. “Things which are most innocent in themselves may be wrong because of peculiar circumstances.”

“And this would be wrong in me, then?” inquired Madeline.

“It will be wrong if it is likely to engross too much of your thoughts.”

“But what is too much?” asked Madeline, eagerly.

“What are your special duties at this season?” answered her father. “All which interferes with them will be too much.”

“I ought to spend some time every day in reading and thinking about being confirmed, I know,” said Madeline.

“But going to the pic-nic will not interfere with that, except upon the one day; and even then you might give up some time earlier in the morning.”

Madeline looked at him with an expression of sadness. “Ah! papa,” she said, “you think I am as good as Ruth. But if I do give up the time I shall never fix my thoughts.”

Mr. Clifford smiled. “We have reached the right point, my dear Madeline. I can quite understand your feelings. Most likely the pic-nic would occupy a good deal of your thoughts; and, just now, when it is so very essential that you should be serious and collected, such a temptation may well be avoided;

at another time it might be better to battle with it. Only I would ask you one question. What is it that makes the pic-nic too interesting—more interesting than religion?"

Madeline's eyes filled with tears as she replied, "Because I am so bad."

Mr. Clifford took her hand in his: "I did not mean to distress you, my dear child. I was sure you felt this; but will you try not to forget it? I mean to remember it always on similar occasions."

"I don't think it will be easy to forget it," said Madeline.

"Yes, indeed, it will be a great deal easier than you imagine. Many right-minded people are extremely apt to do so."

"To forget that they do wrong things?" said Madeline, with some surprise.

"To forget that it is not because they are good, but because they are wicked, that innocent amusements do them harm," replied Mr. Clifford.

"Yet they are right in not joining in them," said Madeline.

"Quite right; but quite wrong if they condemn others. If you were very good, you might go to the pic-nic and not be at all disturbed by it. Others of your own age may go who will be preparing for confirmation like you. Their minds may be much steadier than yours. I wonder what you will think about them."

Madeline did not know what to answer.

"Will you, my love," continued Mr. Clifford, "make it an especial subject of prayer that you may be able to remember why you do not go? And when the day comes, will you spend your time for meditation, in thinking particularly about your faults; seeing how great they are, and how many things are dangerous to you because of them? Such thoughts are

our only safeguard when we refuse to join in the amusements of our friends. They are the only thoughts which can keep us from being proud and uncharitable."

"I hope I should not think others wrong in going," said Madeline; "because Ruth will go, most probably, and she is so very good."

"Does Ruth wish to go?" asked Mr. Clifford, quickly.

"I think she does; but she does not talk about it." Mr. Clifford looked graver than before. "It is a most important time for you both," he said. "I should be glad to feel that you were giving up as much thought to it as possible."

"I try every day," said Madeline; "but, papa, my thoughts go all away, and then I am very unhappy;" and here her voice changed as she added, "it is very wicked, I know, but I leave sometimes to wait another year."

"Another year would not help you, my child. You would come with the same request at the end of it."

"And should I never be more fit?" said Madeline.

"Why seek for what God does not require?" said Mr. Clifford. "When our Saviour restored the lame and the blind, did He wish them to walk and see a little before He made them quite whole?"

"He told them they must have faith," said Madeline.

"Yes; that is, He required a trust in His power, and a willingness to be cured. This is all He asks now of you."

"I should like to be good more than anything," observed Madeline.

"And not only that, but I think you are willing to do all that may be necessary, whether agreeable

or not, in order to become good," continued her father. "We must not separate these two things. A person suffering from some bodily disease, for instance, will say he would like to be cured; but he may not like to try the remedy. He may be suffering from the toothache and yet not agree to have the tooth extracted."

"That is what I mean," said Madeline, quickly. "I should like to feel that I had got rid of some of the bad things, and then I should be more sure that I was willing—that I was fit for the blessings. Because you know, papa," she added, in a faltering voice, "I am not at all fit for the Holy Communion, and I must go to it if I am confirmed."

"But, my dear Madeline," said Mr. Clifford, "the getting rid of these 'bad things,' as you term it, is to be the business of your life. Confirmation and the Holy Communion are to be your great assistants in this business. If you throw away the help, what are you to do?"

"I might pray and read the Bible," said Madeline.

"God tells you to do something more," replied Mr. Clifford. "He will not accept us if we perform only half our duties."

"And I must go," said Madeline, whilst the tears which had for some time been gathering, flowed slowly down her cheeks.

Mr. Clifford suffered her to cry silently for some moments; at length he said, "You are frightened, dearest."

"Yes, so very frightened sometimes," said Madeline, in a broken voice; "and, papa, I think I should be glad not to go; that shows how bad I am."

"Then if I were to tell you that you should never go," said Mr. Clifford, "you would be contented?"

Madeline started. "Oh! papa! no. I could not bear it."

"And God does not wish you to bear it," replied her father. "He is willing—more willing than you can imagine—to receive you; to love you, and bless you, and make you happy. He asks for no fitness except that which you have yourself just this moment acknowledged. You may go to your Confirmation, you may even kneel to receive the Holy Communion, conscious of all your faults, all your imperfections, yet with the same confidence in His love as you feel now in mine. And Madeline, my child, by and by, years hence—if it should please God to spare your life—you will see all this fully, you will be thankful and happy then, that you were not suffered to give way to doubts and scruples now. Religion will be all in all to you."

"As it is to you," said Madeline.


A momentary shade passed over Mr. Clifford's countenance; yet it was but momentary: a quiet, bright smile followed it, and he looked in his child's face and said, "Yes, Madeline, as it is, I trust, now, all in all—the one great joy—the one unchanging reality."

Madeline was silent. The feelings gathering in her breast could find no words for utterance. She only said as she left the room, "Then, papa, you will settle for me that I am not to go to the pic-nic."

CHAPTER XVI.

WE will take a glance at Mrs. De Lacy's drawing-room on the afternoon of the following day. It was a long, rather narrow room, terminating in a bow, with French windows opening upon a lawn. The furniture was too showy to be elegant. The paper attracted attention from its bright pink pattern and gilding; the eye was disturbed and confused by the number of odd-shaped chairs, sofas, inlaid tables, and light ornaments, which crowded a comparatively small space; every book seemed to have drest itself in its gayest binding; and every article approaching to the useful was carefully disguised, by being turned into some shape totally unlike itself.

By the round table, drawn into the recess of the bow, Justine Le Vergnier reclined, in a low easy chair, whilst Florence stood by her, picking to pieces a leaf of verbenä. Justine wore a walking-dress, but her very small transparent bonnet was untied, and thrown back off her head; and either this circumstance, or it might have been really an alteration in the expression of her face, gave her a less gentle, quiet look than formerly. Her eyes moved more quickly, though they were always remarked as never being still; her lips curled satirically; her attitude was more studied and less graceful. She had an air of self-possession and determination, not pleasing in so young a person; altogether there was the indescribable change, not to be seen in any one particular, but to be felt perpetually, which indicates a character that is lowering, not rising, in tone. Florence, in



the presence of Justine, appeared a simple, retiring girl."

"And my aunt has really brought matters to an end, then," said the former, throwing away the last atom of the faded leaf, and turning to Justine with a doubtful smile.

"Ah, oui,—that is, it must be an end soon. Madame is most entirely obliging, delighted: we shall be the best friends."

"It would be all very well if it were not for that letter of Ruth's," said Florence. "If she has a conscience crotchet, she may do us harm at any moment."

"Mais, tu es triste, mon amie," said Justine, laughing. "I care nothing for Ruth; and you have written."

"Yes, but perhaps she may not come to the picnic; or, she may choose to go and talk about you beforehand; she threatens to do so. I wonder, Justine, you can take it all so quietly."

"Now, listen," said Justine, holding up her finger, and looking archly at Florence; "you know we are famous—we French, I mean—for sunshine—'*gaieté de cœur*.' I am French; I have had heaps of troubles before—I shall have heaps again. But why vex me? If I don't stay here I shall go somewhere else—I shall do something."

Florence looked at her with a mixture of wonder and irritation.

"What am I to do?" she exclaimed. "My aunt will say I have deceived her."

Justine shrugged her shoulders.

"Bien! and if you have it was for a friend. But where was the deceit? Madame asked what I was like—you told her; you gave my account. Who knows me as well as I know myself? What for should she ask questions of that woman—that Mrs. Carter?"

"Mrs. Carter is certainly extremely prejudiced," said Florence.

"That is little!—c'est affreux —she tells. I would not say what she tells, and all because she would get another into my place."

"And yet you can be indifferent whether Ruth talks about you or not," said Florence.

"Point du tout!—not at all indifferent; but you see there are always ways. We will come over Ruth."

"Not so easily as you may think," replied Florence.

"Pardon! I knew Ruth when you did."

"At school; but you saw little enough of her."

"Enough for what I wish. Ruth loves dearly to rule; she loves to put that little finger of hers into other persons' concerns; she shall put it into mine."

"Yours!" exclaimed Florence, in a tone of alarm.

Justine laughed heartily.

"Ah! to be sure! you take fright; but trust me. See what a pretty note I have written;" and she drew a folded paper from her reticule, and gave it to Florence. "You see, my happiness rests on her coming to the pic-nic," said Justine, still laughing, as she quoted her own words; "I have so much confidence to give her: I want her advice. She can't help herself now—she must come."

"And she must keep quiet till she has seen you," said Florence.

"Of course; Ruth is most proper—she is full of honour; she will never speak till we have met."

"And if you do meet, what then?" inquired Florence.

"We will see—we will think," said Justine, lightly tapping her forehead. "I never was in a trouble yet, but I found my way out of it; and we will go, mignonne, you and I; we will have our treat; we will be at Paris together."

"And you will show me all the best shops, and tell my aunt about everything that is fit to be seen, and do just whatever I like," said Florence.

"Oui, assurance! let me only be there. Once in Paris—in my country—la belle France, we will have our pleasure then; and it is so bright, so gay. Ah, Florence! you don't live in England; it is all as you said one day—eat, drink, sleep, and begin again."

"The difficulty is to manage it," said Florence, musingly. "You will really take a great deal of care of Agnes, won't you, Justine?" she added.

"Surely; the greatest of all. Did I not take care of the little Darnleys? That very evening when I went out to see my friends—the evening I was so caught; I had put them all quietly to bed: they were asleep—very comfortable—no harm could happen to them."

"You have a charming accent," said Florence; that is one great advantage. My aunt heard it remarked the other day, and she admires your voice extremely. If you only make Agnes sing as well, she will be quite satisfied."

"Ah! we will do everything—everything à merveille!" answered Justine, laughing; "only just at the present moment we must think about this little affair. You are writing to Alice; put my note in the envelope, and Alice will give it."

"A good notion," observed Florence; "we shall save a day by it; for my aunt is going to drive over to the Manor this afternoon, and she can take it."

"I wish I could be quite sure that there is no fear of Lady Catharine," said Justine, less lightly than was usual.

"Oh! you need not be under any alarm about her," replied Florence; "it was one of my first inquiries of Alice. I should never have proposed your staying here so long, if I had not been quite

sure upon that point. Lady Catharine scarcely remembers your name, Alice says. You know Mrs. Carter never tells more than she can help of her school matters ; and if she did, my aunt always calls you Veray, happily. I was never so grateful before for her habit of misnaming French people."

"Then you don't wish to go with your aunt to-day?" inquired Justine.

"Oh no ; it was half proposed that I should, but I have no fancy for encountering Juno, even for the sake of Alice. The very sight of the Manor gives me a fit of low spirits ; and how Alice can exist there I can't imagine. I should make up romances, and fill it with ghosts for my own amusement."

"Ghosts !" repeated Justine, and a strange look of thought crossed her face. "Les revenans ! I don't like them."

Florence began to laugh, but Justine was grave.

"I could not live in a place where there were any," she said ; and then she added quickly : "What shall we do this afternoon?"

"Now, really, Justine, you are silly," persisted Florence. "Ghosts are nothings."

"I am not so certain ; I don't fancy them," again observed Justine.

"And you look quite in earnest," said Florence, fixing her eyes upon her.

"Ah oui, in earnest ; one must be in earnest sometimes."

Justine sighed ; and Florence said, in a tone of vexation :

"Why, Justine, you are dull ; what has come over you all of a sudden?"

"Ce n'est rien, c'est une folie ; what shall we do this afternoon?"

"Drive in the pony-chaise ; but, Justine, I should like to know," said Florence, according to her old

custom, still keeping up a disagreeable subject,—“I should be glad if you would tell me what made you grow so dull in a minute?”

“We are all dull at times,” replied Justine; “that is, in England. No one is dull in France.”

“You must not be dull with my aunt,” observed Florence; “she cannot endure dulness. It must be nothing but talking and laughing for ever to suit her; that is what she likes in you.”

“Well! she may depend; I will do my best,” replied Justine. “But you see, Florence, *chere amie*, one sits alone now and then, and then the thoughts come. It was all Mrs. Carter; she put them into my head first.”

“But what thoughts?” inquired Florence, in a curious tone.

“All sorts; very dull ones. It was such a dull house; it gives me ‘*les vapeurs*’ to think of it.”

“What do you mean?” asked Florence.

“Why, you ought to know,” replied Justine, impatiently; “you have said the same yourself.”

“I don’t remember; I can’t understand,” continued Florence. “I wish you would be plain.”

Justine shrugged her shoulders, and exclaimed against the stupidity of Florence, and then added:

“It was not always so; when I was in London first, I was very bright—always laughing; the world seemed quite merry; and when I went amongst you all, that was bright too. I liked it; I liked Mrs. Carter; she was very kind, and I could bear the sermons, though she gave me a good many. Now and then I listened to them and tried to please her. It was just a fit, but it went off. Clara Manners laughed at her, and I laughed. One can’t think gravely about things that people say when one laughs at them; and so, by-and-by, I came to care less for her long speeches; and then they were tiresome to

me ; and then I could not bear them, and I took to reading those books just to forget them."

"And the fuss that was made!" said Florence, lifting up her hands.

"Yes, the fuss! shall you ever forget it? But I was better off than you; I could get away and read just as many as I chose; and they were charming; they put all the long sermons out of my head. She used to call sometimes and go over all the old grievances, and I behaved very well; I listened like a lamb; but I never cared for anything, because I could forget."

"There will be one comfort here," said Florence "my aunt will never preach dull sermons to you."

"But it is the forget which is the trouble," said Justine; "all that talking and preaching, and telling one to say prayers, and think that some day or other I am to grow old and die, comes back; it makes me ill. When you said about the ghosts, it came; it is quite sudden; it does not stay, but it is horrible; it makes me feel—ah!" and Justine drew a long breath.

Florence looked rather blank at this announcement.

"You don't mean to have these fits often, do you?" she said.

"Mean! but who would have them that could help. No, I dance, sing, play, anything but think."

"And you may read too," observed Florence. "My aunt likes novels, and she will lend you as many as you wish."

"But it is not the same as it was; I read, but I am tired. I don't care for the books now," said Justine, yawning; "they are all alike. Ah! Florence, to be rich! that is the thing."

"Yes, that is the thing," said Florence; "one could have so many pleasures if one were only rich."

"But you are rich; you can go where you like; think of me, without a penny in the world, if I don't

work, work, and talk, and teach; and forced besides to go here, and stay there, and never have a will of my own. Oh! it is sad—this life.”

“Pauvre petite! I am very sorry for you,” said Florence, kindly; “but if we can have our way about Paris, it will all be well; and we will forget the ghosts and the sermons.”

Justine rose suddenly from her seat, and opening the piano began to sing a lively French air. Florence lingered near her, praising and caressing her. Justine’s face resumed its usual expression, and before a quarter of an hour had elapsed, her manner was as light and her voice as gay as if she had never been troubled by a serious thought.

CHAPTER XVII.

THAT same day at the Manor was spent by Alice unlike that of Florence, but it was not without importance to her. It did not, indeed, differ materially from many others which she had lately passed, but there is no such thing as standing still in life. As we move onwards in time, so we also move onwards in the formation of our characters. The direction which Alice was taking was unfortunately a wrong one, though it might not have seemed so at the first glance. Alice was passing a busy morning; her table was spread with scraps of paper, account books, lists of names, and calculations; upon her desk a large ruled book lay open, filled with strokes, and dots, and various unintelligible marks; and some untidy black pens, torn sheets of blotting paper, and a ragged pen wiper, were near it. Alice had a pencil and a ruler in her hand, and was just proceeding to work, to make up some of the club accounts, when Lady Catharine looked into the room.

"What are you doing, my dear?" she said; "I thought this was your reading morning."

"I am going to finish the accounts," was Alice's reply.

"The accounts? I understood they were to have been done yesterday."

"I had not time," replied Alice, beginning to rule diligently.

Lady Catharine advanced into the room. "My dear, I don't like that excuse. I hear it a great deal too often. If you managed your time properly there would be no occasion for it."

"I was out yesterday afternoon," said Alice.

"I beg your pardon, my dear, you were not out very long. You had sufficient leisure when you returned: what did you do with yourself?"

"I read history," said Alice, rather sulkily.

"But I wish you to read in the morning. Had you no time then either?"

"Not enough," said Alice.

Lady Catharine bit her lip. "It is so strange, my dear, that when I have marked out your day, given you precise hours for every thing, when you really have nothing whatever to interfere with you, that you should still be so exceedingly irregular. What was the reason that you did not read in the morning?"

Alice blushed, and said she had taken up the "Bride of Lammermoor," and had become so interested in it that she did not know how the time went by, till it was nearly the luncheon hour.

Lady Catharine was too much annoyed to be softened by Alice's sincerity. She walked up to the bookcase, and stood before it thinking. "I had hoped these books would have had a different effect," she said. "They were meant for proper recreation at proper hours."

Alice went on with her occupation, but the very manner in which she handled her pencil shewed that a storm was brewing.

"If you were a baby, Alice," continued Lady Catharine, "I should be inclined to take these books to my own room, and only lend them to you at particular times. They are a sad temptation where there is no strength of mind to resist."

Alice looked up, and said, with an indifferent air, "Certainly it might be better if they were not here."

Lady Catharine made no reply. She came near to

Alice, and saw what she was doing, and then she said coldly, "Your method is a bad one; you will never be correct if you do not arrange the names alphabetically."

Alice continued ruling.

"You can never refer easily, if you do not," continued Lady Catharine. "Has Mr. Clifford seen the book?"

Alice replied that she had shown it to him once, but he had not found fault with it.


"That was because he was too good-natured," said Lady Catharine; "and, in fact, gentlemen do not understand these things well. It would be quite worth your while to begin it again."

Alice's pencil dropped from her fingers, and she laid her hands on her lap.

"Of course, my dear, you think me very particular," said Lady Catharine, trying to assume a gentler voice; "but when you are arrived at my age, you will see that these little things constitute the real comfort and well-being of our lives. Without order, neatness, and regularity, the highest virtues may become comparatively useless."

Alice turned to a blank page, and rising, offered Lady Catharine her seat; and asked if she would have the kindness to show her in what way she thought the accounts might be better kept.

Lady Catharine hesitated, then sat down, and began to examine the book. She read over some of the names, and commented upon them. "'Gibbs;' they pay constantly, I see. 'Moore;' I wonder they have kept on so long, with the husband so ill. 'Barker;' they were always irregular, when I had the management; but they must be inquired after. 'Goring;' I see they only paid the first three weeks. Take the names down on paper Alice, and we will go and enquire about them this afternoon."



Alice said that Mr. Clifford had spoken to her upon the subject, and she had intended to go herself and tell the people they must be regular.

"Hem! I don't know. Did Mr. Clifford beg you to go?"

"Ruth and Madeline used to do it, and I thought I might," said Alice.

"We can go together," said Lady Catharine. "I shall like to have the opportunity of talking to the people myself; and I am not fond of your visiting the cottages alone."

Lady Catharine did not see the expression of Alice's face, or she would probably have continued her task of arranging the accounts with less satisfaction. She went on in happy ignorance, really doing Alice very material service, and, by her neatness and precision, clearing all difficulties; and Alice stood by with folded hands, silent and abstracted. When Lady Catharine had finished half a page, she said cheerfully, as she held the pencil over her shoulder to Alice, "There, my dear, I think I have done some good; now you will go on easily."

An icicle could not have been more chilling than Alice's "Thank you."

Lady Catharine turned round suddenly, looked her full in the face, and laying her hand upon her, said, very gravely, "Alice, are we always to live together in this way?"

Alice withdrew her hand, but did not speak.

"Have you nothing to say?" continued Lady Catharine.

"I am sorry to have vexed you," replied Alice.

Lady Catharine rose up in her most stately manner. "Alice," she said, "you know that is not what I require. I do not wish you to say you are sorry, when you do not feel it."

"I am sorry I did not finish the accounts yester-

day," said Alice; and there was evidently truth in the acknowledgment.

"It is not one case which is of consequence," observed Lady Catharine; "it is the perpetual repetition, the constant neglect of small duties, which I complain of. You are always late; always behind-hand; always untidy; always forgetting."


Alice's features grew more rigid as Lady Catharine became more excited.

"When I was your age," continued Lady Catharine, "I was always dressed by seven; I read the Psalms and Lessons, and some devotional book for half an hour; then I entered upon the business of the day. My life was ordered with the most perfect regularity. I never undertook a task till I had appointed the hour at which it was to be performed. I had the care of my own wardrobe; there was never a button or a hook missing. I read history every day, and I now have books and books which I filled with notes. When I was taken into society I always arranged my time so that my pursuits should not be materially interfered with. I am not telling you these things, Alice, with any notion of having been better than other people, but merely to show you what I did myself; and, therefore, what I have a fair right to expect from you."

Alice stood like a statue.

"These are no light matters," continued Lady Catharine; "they tell upon your inward habit of mind. If you cannot make an exertion in small things, you cannot make it in great; and how then will you be fitted for confirmation? It is a very serious question indeed."

Alice changed colour; it seemed as if she were about to take some desperate resolution; but the conversation was interrupted.



A servant announced that Mrs. De Lacy was in the drawing-room.


"I will come," said Lady Catharine ; and when the door closed, she repeated again, "It is a very serious question, Alice ;—I leave you to think of it."

Lady Catharine walked slowly out of the room, and then Alice sat down, and resting her head upon the table, cried bitterly.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JUNO herself could not have received a visitor to Olympus with a more majestic air than that with which Lady Catharine Hyde greeted Mrs. De Lacy. She was in no humour to be agreeable, and unfortunately Mrs. De Lacy was not a person to produce a favourable impression ; for she was deficient in ability and tact, and Lady Catharine grew more ceremonious as she found it difficult to think of anything to say. Mrs. De Lacy asked for Alice, but Lady Catharine would not propose to send for her ; and, after having endured her penance as long as civility required, Mrs. De Lacy rose to take leave, laying on the table at the same time a note for Alice, and expressing a formal hope that nothing would prevent their meeting next week at St. Cuthbert's. The arrangements for the pic-nic were not quite made ; when they were she would do herself the honour of communicating with Lady Catharine respecting them. Lady Catharine bowed. She would willingly have declared that she would have nothing to do with the pic-nic, and that Alice would be much better at home ; but the habit of self-command was more powerful than the feeling of annoyance, and Mrs. De Lacy departed, congratulating herself that the visit was over, and designating Lady Catharine as the most tiresome, stiff, haughty piece of propriety she had ever encountered.

Lady Catharine sat in silent meditation when her visitor was gone. But it was neither Mrs. De Lacy's wearisome insipidity, nor Alice's conduct which occupied her thoughts. She reflected upon her own



cold manner—her spirit of impatience at imperfection—the want of sympathy she was conscious of having shown; and having blamed herself in one instance, she began to consider how far she had been right in others. Her treatment of Alice was always a fertile topic of enquiry, and she was still considering it, when another visitor was announced—rather an unusual one at that time of the day,—Mr. Clifford. Lady Catharine's natural distance of manner was never entirely overcome even by her thorough respect for Mr. Clifford's character, and reverence for his office. But Mr. Clifford was one of the few persons to whom it was a matter of indifference. His greeting was as hearty as if he had been sure of having it fully returned, instead of receiving a passive touch from a stiff hand, which seemed moved by wires, and fell helplessly as soon as the first impetus had ceased. His tone also was generally cheerful and free, and Lady Catharine, like many other cold-mannered persons, peculiarly enjoyed the society of those who would draw her out of herself. This day, however, Mr. Clifford appeared under restraint, and talked upon the weather and the crops, subjects which are always suspicious between persons who ought to be at home with each other. Presently he enquired how Alice was. Lady Catharine smoothed her mittens and knitted her brow, and said she was quite well. This was sufficient to show Mr. Clifford that "well" did not mean well in mind. Without attempting to introduce by degrees the subject upon which he wished to speak, he said,

"I have been desirous, for some days, Lady Catharine, to talk to you about Alice."

Lady Catharine's face changed instantly. The cloud of reserve passed away, and she gave Mr. Clifford her hand again, and said, "Thank you: Alice is always in my thoughts."

"You are anxious about her, I am afraid," said Mr. Clifford; "so am I: but I should be glad to learn from you that there is no cause for it."

Lady Catharine sighed, and the deep, sorrowful lines in her forehead seemed to contract and grow more marked.

"I am afraid there is cause," continued Mr. Clifford. "I am afraid Alice is not yet what we both desire to see her." He paused for a moment, and added, "I have a doubt whether, in her present state, she is fitted for confirmation."

Lady Catharine gave a slight start; then, as if ashamed of such an expression of quick feeling, stretched her neck and threw back her head, and again began to smoothe and settle the black mittens, which already fitted her hand like wax. A look of proud displeasure rested upon her countenance; but it did not remain there. There was a struggle of some moments between natural haughtiness and Christian lowliness, whilst she leant her elbow upon an arm of the chair, trying to cover her face with her hand, and hide the large tears which rolled slowly down her cheeks.

Mr. Clifford was pained to see her; but he was compelled to pursue the subject. "You are disappointed, my dear Lady Catharine," he said; "and not you alone—all who love you, and know how your heart rests upon Alice, are feeling with you."

"No," exclaimed Lady Catharine, looking up; "to feel with me is impossible."

She was silent again, and Mr. Clifford doubted how far he might venture to say more. But Lady Catharine presently continued, in a gentler but very hurried tone,

"Mr. Clifford, you have known the history of my past life—my early happiness—my great trial; and you have seen its effect. I long lived to myself,

solitary in feeling, devoted as I hoped to the service of God. Earth had no charm for me, it was but a dreary passage to a happier world. But God gave me an interest for this present world; Alice was left to me, and I was not only contented, but thankful to live. I thought that I was once more to know happiness. Only in a few short months the happiness was gone. I saw that Alice must not be educated by me, and I sent her from me. I bore that separation; for it seemed only for a time, and I believed that when she returned we should only be the more happy together from having been for a while parted. When the time came for her to leave school, I looked forward with delight to having her as a companion. I gave up thought, and comfort, and leisure, to make arrangements for her. I would have done a thousand times more and considered it no hardship, and what is my return?" Lady Catharine's voice grew husky, and she paused.

"Rather what will be the return by and by?" said Mr. Clifford, mildly. "At Alice's age—"

Lady Catharine interrupted him. "Alice is older than your own children. What would be your feelings if you were told they were not fitted for confirmation?"

"Most painful, doubtless," he replied. "But indeed, Lady Catharine, you have mistaken me if you thought I meant to decide the question. I have called this morning only to ask your opinion upon it."

"I can give none," replied Lady Catharine. "Alice is entirely reserved with me. I believe she reads the books which you recommend, and she acquiesces in any observation I may make; but that is all."

"And her daily conduct —" began Mr. Clifford.

"Her daily conduct is a mystery. I have no idea what principles govern her. Sometimes she seems

bent upon attending to her duties; and occasionally, though very rarely, the motive seems to be that of pleasing me. Then again she is careless, self-willed, and moody, and shows a coldness of feeling which is utterly repelling."

"I can scarcely imagine Alice to be really cold," observed Mr. Clifford. "I have always imagined that she possessed strong feelings, if they could be brought out. Do you not think that it sometimes answers to take feeling and principle for granted?"

"I do not quite understand you," was lady Catharine's stiff reply, as she had recourse to her knitting.

"I mean," replied Mr. Clifford, "that some young persons—Alice may be amongst the number—are more worked upon by knowing that it is believed they have good feelings and intentions, than by being suspected of having bad ones, or at least none at all."

"I cannot believe in what I do not think exists," said Lady Catharine.

"But," continued Mr. Clifford, "(you must forgive me if I am speaking ignorantly,) Alice does occasionally appear to have right principles."

"Very seldom."

"Still it is sometimes. Do you not find her then alive to encouragement?"

Lady Catharine was silent. Encouragement she was conscious was not very often given. Presently she threw aside her knitting, and looking steadily at Mr. Clifford, said, "You think I have pursued a wrong system with Alice?"

It was an observation difficult to answer. After a momentary hesitation, Mr. Clifford said, "I have no right to judge; I know so little of Alice's daily life."

"Truth is better than civility," observed Lady Catharine, very coldly; and she returned again to her work.

Mr. Clifford did not allow even a shade of annoyance to be visible on his face, and answered, with perfect gentleness, "I desire always to be true. I cannot really judge correctly about Alice; but I should imagine our views with regard to her might differ."

"Very possibly," replied Lady Catharine, shortly.

"Alice is no longer a child," continued Mr. Clifford.

"Not in age, but in character she is."

"Still, do you not think it may be safer to treat her according to her age? We are sure of that, we are not sure of her disposition."

"I don't know. These modern notions are beyond me. I was brought up to be perfectly obedient; I wish Alice to be the same."

"Again I must refer to her age," said Mr. Clifford.

"As a sanction for disobedience?" exclaimed Lady Catharine. "That is the last thing I should have expected from you."

"No; not for the world to sanction disobedience," he replied; "but if there are few rules, there is less opening for disobedience."

Lady Catharine knitted extremely fast, and began to count her stitches diligently.

"Of course," pursued Mr. Clifford, "if Alice had not been brought up in habits of obedience, I should be alarmed at the idea of giving her freedom now. I really cannot say too strongly how entirely I uphold strict discipline for very young children. Obedience in them is no obedience at all to my mind, unless it is instantaneous. What persons generally call obedience, strikes me as mere rebellion. I would make a baby in arms obedient. But when this is done, I think we need not be afraid of liberty at such an age as Alice has reached."

"This may be all very well for Ruth and Made-

line," said Lady Catharine; "but Alice is different. You do not know her, Mr. Clifford."

"No, indeed, I do not," he answered; "that is my great trouble."

"She is uncertain, wilful, hasty, vain, careless,—she is really very provoking," said Lady Catharine.

"Yes, I can fully believe it; but she has, I suppose, qualities on the other side?"

"Oh, yes; a great many. She is reverent-minded; and I don't think she is conceited; and she feels, I believe, quickly and warmly, though she does not show it much to me. Then, although she is not naturally sincere, I sometimes find her very candid; and she has a good deal of energy, though no perseverance."

"They are good materials to work upon," observed Mr. Clifford.

"Yes; but what is to be done if they are counter-balanced by the bad?"

"There are two methods to be tried," was the reply; "neither of them indeed separately; but, as a principle, one will always predominate,—either constantly to check the evil, or to make a point of encouraging the good."

Lady Catharine answered rather abruptly, "To consider these properly would lead us into a discussion upon the very first principles of education."

"Yes; and I would not intrude upon your time; and I really have not enough of my own to spare. I merely threw out the remark as a suggestion."

"You uphold encouraging the good?" said Lady Catharine.

"Yes; and I think I have good authority. But I must not enter farther into the subject now. I think, however, you would find that when the good points of a character are encouraged, the bad ones will often die away."

Lady Catharine only replied, "It may be so;" and then, returning to the former topic, inquired what were Mr. Clifford's intentions as to the Confirmation.

"I came," he said, "hoping to receive some information here; but as that cannot be, I think it will be advisable to make an effort myself to reach the state of Alice's mind. I must certainly be more satisfied about her before I pronounce her fit for confirmation."

He spoke decidedly, and Lady Catharine again looked extremely distressed. She did not however endeavour to alter his impression, but wished him good morning at first as stiffly as usual. Mr. Clifford's manner however softened her, and tears stood in her eyes as she shook his hand with heartiness, and said, "If I have made a mistake I am already punished for it."

When Mr. Clifford was gone, Lady Catharine went to her room, and sent a message to Alice, that she might, if she liked it, spend the afternoon at the Parsonage.

CHAPTER XIX.

ALICE had seldom been more sensible of the comfort of having friends near her than when she sat down to dinner at the Parsonage; for the time being, free and unconstrained. Ruth indeed was not in one of her gayest moods, but this suited the melancholy temper of mind in which Alice left the Manor; and her spirits were more soothed by the quiet, sensible conversation which passed, than they could have been by mirth, in which she would not have been inclined to join. They went to the shore in the evening; Ruth and Alice walked together. The tide was going out, and all was very still, though the waves plashed gently as they rolled over the hard ribbed sand which stretched away to a great distance, covered in parts by shallow pools, that sparkled like burnished gold in the light of the sinking summer sun. Alice had a natural taste for beauty in nature; she could catch the different effects of light and shade with something of an artist's eye; and now she pointed out to Ruth the high jutting rocks, black with the accumulation of sea-weed, which, with the dark outline of the red cliffs, formed a mass of shadow boldly contrasting with the brilliant colouring of the sky. Ruth's eye followed the same direction, but it did not rest there; it travelled higher, where purple clouds, tipped with gold, were piled one upon another, in forms of mountains, and castles, and cliffs, melting, as they approached nearer to the sun, into shapes of dazzling brilliancy, or spreading themselves out in

long clear lines, till the whole breadth of the horizon was a sheet of vivid colour.

Time had been when Ruth would have gazed upon that radiant spectacle, that type of the glory which shall be hereafter, and thought only of purity, and hope, and the loveliness of an untainted world. Then, in childhood, her heart would have bounded within her, for the hues of the evening sky would have seemed the actual reality of heaven. Now she was changed! Childhood had passed, and with it its radiant deceptions. Ruth thought that she saw more clearly; she had learnt to account for what she looked upon; to know why the clouds took their colouring from the sun; to be aware that forms which appeared so majestic were masses of vapour. She no longer fancied it possible to wander amongst the golden rocks, or sail upon the smooth sheet of water which appeared floating around their base; and at this calm and most beautiful hour her thoughts were only of earth.

Poor Ruth! it was a sad exchange that she was making; it is a sad exchange which we all make when we begin to take so great an interest in this world as to cease to be reminded of another. Even Alice was more open to enjoyment from the scene than she was; for Alice was sorrowful, and a heavy heart makes us look with interest upon the boundless, glorious sky, because it seems that, if we once could reach it, we should have passed beyond the power of mortal care.

Alice waited with patience whilst Ruth wished to rest. After a long silence, Ruth spoke—

"I wonder whether this weather will continue next week,—it will be beautiful for the pic-nic."

"I had forgotten the pic-nic," said Alice, heaving a deep sigh; "shall you enjoy it?"

"Madeline is not going," was Ruth's evasive ob-

servation ; and before Alice could interrupt her by expressing surprise, she added, "You will go, of course."

Alice said she did not know ; and began searching for something in the pocket of her dress. "Where can it be?" she said. "I remember now ; Marsham gave it me just as I was coming away : it was a note from Florence. Mrs. De Lacy brought it. Do you know, I was in such a hurry, so worried, I forgot to look at it." She produced the envelope, and broke the seal. Justine's note fell to the ground. Ruth saw that it was for her, and guessed from whom it came by the cramped hand-writing. She did not choose to read it then, and Alice did not notice that she had it. "Florence is careful now," said Alice, after she had skimmed her own note. "I must thank you, Ruth, for that ; but I think I troubled myself without cause. Things cannot be worse than they are ; Lady Catharine is determined never to be pleased with me, so whether she scolds me for one thing more or less does not much signify."

Ruth's attention was attracted by Alice's desponding tone, and she exclaimed, "Dear Alice, there must be something going on worse than usual."

"I don't know that it is worse," replied Alice, "only perhaps I feel it more to-day, and there seems no end to it. And it was not so much my fault. I was doing what I was obliged to do : settling the accounts. Why should she fret me to-day for what was wrong yesterday?"

Ruth drew figures on the sand by way of occupation, for she really did not know what answer to make to this often-repeated style of complaint, and she did not quite understand how the constant repetition of any particular annoyance tends to increase it.

Alice perceived Ruth's want of sympathy ; and, leaving her, walked away by herself, till a projecting rock

hid her from sight. Then she sat down upon the sand, resting against the rock, and, closing her eyes, listened to the low rushing of the waves, whilst suffering thoughts and fancies to pass through her mind rapidly, and without connexion, as in a dream. They were all sorrowful, all tending to increase the conviction that her lot in life was a sorrowful one, and destined to become still more so. Alice sat long in this mood, at last she heard her name repeated, and looking up, saw Mr. Clifford making his way to her over the rocks. As he came near, he began to rally her upon her sudden passion for solitude. Alice had no heart to answer in the same strain, and merely said, that she liked quietness sometimes.

"And this is a pleasant seat," said Mr. Clifford, throwing himself upon the sand by her side; "I am glad you like quietness, Alice. As a boy," he continued, "I have spent many hours on such evenings as this, watching the sun sinking, and fancying myself travelling with it to other lands. Now, one has little leisure for such dreamings."

"I don't like sunset," observed Alice; "it is always melancholy."

"But a little melancholy is not disagreeable," said Mr. Clifford: "a very little—such as one feels when relaxing, after a hard day's work."

Alice showed no willingness to enter into the conversation. She stood up and remarked, that as the tide was coming in, they had better go back.

"Wait a few minutes," said Mr. Clifford; "there is no hurry; and Ruth is gone to meet her mamma and Madeline."

Alice felt herself caught in a snare; for she was certain that something serious was coming.

"Here is a comfortable seat for you," said Mr. Clifford, pointing to a large stone; and Alice, unable to find an excuse for escape, resealed herself. "J

am glad to have this opportunity of saying a few words to you, Alice," he added; "we are not often alone together."

Alice said "No;" she could think of nothing else.

"And we have a good deal to talk about, have we not?"

Alice said she did not know.

"Time runs on quickly. The Confirmation-day will be here soon—in a month."

"Yes; about a month."

Alice's tone and manner were certainly most discouraging.

"You are like my child now, Alice," continued Mr. Clifford; "you know I must be answerable for what you are going to do. If you were to be confirmed without being properly prepared, it would be my fault."

Alice did not understand, and answered that she supposed she should be prepared after she had attended all the examinations.

"It is not the preparation of the intellect which I am speaking of," replied Mr. Clifford, "but the preparation of the heart."

A sudden light dawned upon Alice's mind, and made her very uncomfortable. Could Mr. Clifford possibly mean that she was not fit to be confirmed. She played with the pebbles on the shore, and made no answer.

"You must let me be plain with you, my dear Alice," was Mr. Clifford's next observation; "as your clergyman should be. I am anxious about you."

Alice murmured that he was very kind.

"I am afraid you will not think it kind when you comprehend me," he replied.

Alice started, but recovered herself instantly; and said, haughtily, that she supposed Lady Catharine had been finding fault with her.

"No, indeed, Alice, you are mistaken. Lady Catharine says nothing but what I can myself see. You are arrived at the proper age for confirmation ; but it is quite possible that you may not be in the proper state of mind."

Alice answered, that she should be glad to know what the particular things were which Lady Catharine complained of.

"I have told you before," replied Mr. Clifford, in a severe tone, "that Lady Catharine does not make particular complaints. What we both fear, is, that you have not sufficiently realized the greatness of the work before you, and therefore have not summoned sufficient strength of will to perform it. Will you tell me one thing? I have given you, at different times, directions as to your private preparation for confirmation,—have you attended to them?"

"I began," said Alice, finding herself obliged to speak.

"You began, but you did not go on ; that may possibly do for your amusements, but it will not do for your religion. The very essence of religion is, that it should be unchanging—the fixed devotion of the heart for life."

Alice made no answer.

"We will think a little more upon this subject," continued Mr. Clifford. "Persons who do great works make themselves thoroughly acquainted with their object. I think, if you were to understand better what is required of you as a Christian, you might be persuaded that it will not be sufficient to begin, but that you must have resolution to go on and labour."

Alice answered, that she thought she knew what a Christian ought to be.


"I doubt it," he replied ; "but you shall tell me what your ideas are."

"I think people ought to be very good," said Alice.

"But that is so vague; I should like to hear more in detail."

He waited for the next observation, but Alice only looked confused, and began twisting and playing with a bunch of sea-weed upon the rock near her.

"Well, then," said Mr. Clifford, after a silence of some moments, "since you cannot explain your notions of your duties, will you let me explain mine? I will begin with the easiest:—those which you and I, and we all, owe to ourselves and our fellow-creatures. Suppose we take them in the order in which the Church puts them. A person then desirous of doing his duty to his neighbours, would be required first of all to love him as himself; now that means, what?" Alice was still silent. "Shall I say what it would mean for you?" continued Mr. Clifford. "It is better, perhaps, to confine our attention to ourselves in these matters. If you, then, were to make up your mind really and heartily to fulfil your duty to your neighbour, you would be obliged to consult the wishes of all about you; to give up your own fancies and pleasures, and think of suiting theirs; and this, not only with regard to persons set over you, but all persons; your friends and companions—your servants even, so far as never to give them unnecessary trouble, never to disturb their comforts, and to try and sympathise in their sorrows and their joys. In all cases, where there was any doubt as to what you should do, you would be obliged to put yourself in the place of others, and judge honestly as to what they might reasonably demand of you; any bias in your own favour would be a fault. Your duty would also be to look upon the friend whom God has given you in the place of your parents with the greatest reverence; to love her, to obey her—implicitly, constantly, without



murmuring, in the smallest particular as well as the most important. You would be greatly to blame if she were in any way to be made unhappy or uncomfortable by your neglect."

Alice almost groaned, so heavy was her sigh ; but Mr. Clifford took no notice.

"Besides domestic duties," he continued, "you would be required to pay respect to all persons in authority. You ought never to speak lightly even of those who seem quite removed from you. It may seem unnecessary to tell you to honour the Queen, yet I am afraid you would think it no harm to repeat idle, disrespectful stories about her, if they happened to be amusing, although this would certainly be a fault ; and the same may be said, even more strongly, with regard to those who have spiritual power—bishops, clergymen in general. It is a very serious evil when persons indulge in irreverence of the kind. They will not take advice from those whom they have been accustomed to ridicule ; and as your words should be reverent, so should your manner be also," added Mr. Clifford, laying a particular stress upon the sentence, a stress which Alice could not but interpret, from the consciousness of her own sulkiness at that very time. "Even so far you would require very constant-watchfulness to keep you right, I suspect," he continued.

Alice assented, though she could not bring herself to make a remark of her own.

"There are other duties, seemingly easier ones," pursued Mr. Clifford, "which the love of our neighbour requires ; but even these are not so easy as we are apt to imagine. We may be kind-hearted and amiable ; but it will be difficult never, under any provocation, to hurt any one, by a cross look or a cross word ; and we may have no temptation to be dishonest, but it will require care never to take an

unfair advantage of other persons' ignorance ; never to profit at their expense ; always to pay strictly what is due from us, whether it is asked for or not. Temptations of this kind come upon us when we are not prepared, and in a great many shapes. So, again, with regard to malice and hatred : they are such harsh terms, that at first sight we are apt to think they cannot possibly apply to us ; but a really earnest Christian knows that even a wish for revenge is forbidden by them."

Mr. Clifford paused, and Alice said :

"No one is so very good ; no one can be."

"Yet even now our Christian duties are not at an end," continued Mr. Clifford. "There must be no attempt, in any way, to appropriate to ourselves what is not justly our due ; no careless speaking ; no unkind amusing stories repeated ; no censure upon others pronounced when not called for ; no giving persons credit for low motives ; no pleasure in hearing evil reports ; and no encouragement given to those who are clever in turning others into ridicule. So also there must be exact truth in all our conversation ; no exaggeration ; no pretence of knowing what we are ignorant of. There must be strict watchfulness and self-denial in such common things as eating and drinking, especially at the appointed times. We must always consider the pleasure and the needs of others before our own ; and never indulge in wishes for luxuries. Then again, with regard to purity and simplicity of heart ; if you once determine to dedicate yourself to God's service, you must not allow an imagination of evil to rest in your mind for a single instant. You must never be curious to hear or read tales of scandal ; if they are told you, you must turn from them, though you may be never so deeply interested in them ; and when such things are brought before you in books, you must never let

your thoughts dwell upon them ; you must never, indeed, read books that you know have such tendencies."

Alice remembered a certain practice which she had lately allowed herself, of studying the newspaper when Lady Catharine was not in the room, without any regard to the subjects mentioned in it. She had done so from mere idle curiosity : but Mr. Clifford's warning was not heard without a pang of self-reproach.

"And beyond all, Alice," he continued, "you must keep a guard over your heart, lest it should lead you to desire riches, or rank, or advantages which God has not given you. You must work diligently, if not to gain your own daily bread—which has been mercifully provided for you—at least to assist others in gaining theirs, by teaching the ignorant and helping those who are in need ; and you must submit your will so entirely to the will of God, that whatever may be your condition in life, whatever your trials, you may never feel a momentary discontent, nor utter a word of repining. Now," he added, "we have gone through one half of a Christian's duties, and that half the least difficult."

"Then I am sure I had better not be confirmed," exclaimed Alice ; "for I shall never perform a quarter of them."

"Seriously—you think so?" enquired Mr. Clifford.

"Yes, I had better not. I should only make a false promise."

"Well, then, we will consider that your mind is made up upon the subject ; in what condition will you be then?"

"Not worse than I was before," said Alice, in a tone of perverseness.

"Nay, that can hardly be. To refuse to be confirmed is to refuse the vow of allegiance to God. It is saying that, although you were made his child at baptism, you do not wish to remain so now that you

are grown up. Alice, if you are not a child of God, whose child are you?" Mr. Clifford's voice was so solemn that Alice trembled. "Indeed, indeed, Alice," he continued, "it is a fearful mistake we make when we imagine that we can in such a case be as we were before. There is no neutral ground upon which we may stand. There is no middle world between Heaven and Hell; the children of God are the heirs of Heaven, and the children of God only."

Alice burst into tears.

"I would speak to you in gentler terms if I dared, my dear Alice," continued Mr. Clifford, taking her hand kindly: "but I am a minister of God; your soul has been entrusted to my charge; the wavering state of your mind is one full of danger, and I must warn you."

"But it is impossible. I can never do what is required," exclaimed Alice, and she rested her forehead upon her hand and sobbed.

"Alice," said Mr. Clifford, "I have placed the strictness of religion before you, because I believed you had never properly considered it. Once resolve to strive after it; once let me see that you have a hearty will, and I should speak very differently."

"To will what I can never do," said Alice.

"Imagine yourself in a different position," replied Mr. Clifford. "Fancy yourself giving directions to a child. When you formed your rules you would know they could not perfectly be kept; yet that would not prevent you from making them. You would not, for instance, say to a child, 'I will allow you to be a little passionate; to be deceitful perhaps twice in the day. You shall only be required to be obedient at certain hours.'"

Alice smiled a little.

"You would require it to be good," said Mr. Clifford; "goodness meaning not the never doing wrong,

but the steadfast determination to try always to do right. God is our Father, Alice ; we are his children. He gives us a perfect law. He asks of us what we would ask of a child—when our promise is made and kept, He accepts us and rewards us ; if we break it and repent, He pardons us ; when we strive ever so feebly, He blesses us, and helps us to strive more ; and, because it is absolutely impossible that by any obedience of our own we could ever deserve heaven, He assures us that if we will only trust and love Him, He will one day bring us there for the sake of Him who has borne the punishment which was our due. Alice, can you still refuse to own yourself God's child ?”

“I wish—I wish,” began Alice.

“Then, my dear Alice, turn your wish into a prayer.”

“I always do pray,” said Alice, in a tone of self-defence.


“That is, you always say your prayers morning and evening. What I mean is something far beyond—prayer constantly from the heart.”

“I never know how,” said Alice, “and I should go on just the same. I never could keep on being good.”

“Alice, in pity to yourself, do not say that ; it is a miserable persuasion to begin life with.”

“It is true—it is quite true,” exclaimed Alice passionately. “I thought I might be better when I was confirmed, and now you will not let me be.”

“No,” replied Mr. Clifford ; “I have never said you should not be confirmed. I have merely doubted whether you were fit for it in your present state of mind. Once let me see that you are in earnest, and it would not give me more pleasure to hear my own children renew the promises of their baptism, than it would to hear you. You little know how deeply I am interested for you.”



Alice folded her hands, and a look of settled despondency rested on her features.

"Prayer," said Mr. Clifford—"that is your great hope—prayer constantly."

And again Alice said, "I have prayed."

"And you despair?" said Mr. Clifford.

"Yes."

"Then listen to me once more. There are solemn duties before you; you think them beyond you—have you never performed them at all?"

"Never," said Alice. "I was never good."

"Think," he continued. "You own that you have duties; if you were thoroughly wicked you would not see them. More than that, you have a wish to do right; the wish is a special gift of God. You say your prayers—let them be never so cold and formal, still the habit is a good one; it shows that you do not desire to throw off religion. You admire those who are good; persons for whom there is no hope, scoff at goodness. You are willing to be confirmed, because you are told to be so; that, at least, is an obedient spirit. We will sum up these points. God, then, has given you a wish to serve Him—a habit of outward religion—a heart to admire goodness—a spirit of obedience to a certain extent. These are the germs of the holiness of a saint; they want but one thing more and they may lead to it."

Mr. Clifford paused, and Alice slowly raised her eyes to his, and listened with breathless attention.

"They want the will to make them so," he added. "All that we ask in prayer, believing, we shall have. Ask for the will and it will be granted you. Ask it especially now, at this season; it may be the turning point of your life. Once gone it may never return. There are two roads before you: one is the broad road that leadeth to destruction, the other is the narrow way that leadeth unto life. Alice, it was the

narrow way which your mother chose ; she travelled it in weariness and pain ; she is resting now in the home of peace in which it ends."

Alice averted her face. She would fain have continued to appear indifferent, but it was impossible.

"You can follow," continued Mr. Clifford.

Alice shook her head.

"You can follow," he repeated. "You have trusted to yourself and you have failed. Trust to your Saviour and you must succeed."

"Never ; it is so hard," persisted Alice ; but her tone was more yielding.

"Hard and impossible by nature ; yet our Lord says that His yoke is easy and His burden light. His words must be true."

"Yes, for others."

"For you and every one. Pray for the will to serve Him and He will give it you ; and with the will He will also grant the power. He will grant it especially at your confirmation ; only be in earnest, and it is impossible that you should be disappointed."

Alice looked up in doubt. "But I must wait for confirmation ?" she said.


"You shall think upon the subject by yourself, and tell me your own wishes another day," replied Mr. Clifford. "I would rather give no decision at present."

He rose to return home. Alice put her arm within his, and, as if by mutual consent, they walked on in silence.

CHAPTER XX.

JUSTINE LE VERGNIER's character, since the time of her dismissal from the society of Mrs. Carter's school, had been rapidly forming, and at the age of seventeen she possessed the decision and determination of many a woman of five-and-twenty. She had been thrown upon her own resources, and forced in many instances to act independently; and, however indifferent she might profess herself to be, as to the turn which events might take, she had in fact fully made up her mind with regard to her own course, and was determined to pursue it at all hazards.

Justine had no intention of remaining a governess all her life. She had formed schemes for a much more brilliant, and, as it appeared to her, a happier lot. Justine had friends, or, more properly speaking, intimate acquaintances, thoughtless and unprincipled, whose society she had encouraged against the advice of her father and Mrs. Carter. They had led her into dissimulation, and great neglect of duty, whilst she was in her former situation, and this being discovered, caused her dismissal. Still Justine would not give them up. She believed that her intercourse with them would at last end in her being married and settled independently; and notwithstanding the grave warnings of Mrs. Carter, and the urgent entreaties of her father, she still continued a correspondence, and took every opportunity of seeing them. These friends were now in France; they would probably remain there a long time. It was possible even that they might not return. When Justine learnt this, her



resolution to follow them was at once taken. This was the clue to all she was now doing—her reason for thrusting herself upon the notice of Florence Trevelyan, insinuating herself into her friendship, and making such efforts to obtain the situation of governess in Mrs. De Lacy's family. It was for her own convenience. Mrs. De Lacy was a weak-minded, good-natured person. Florence was very like her. They were going to France, and the opportunity of accompanying them was advantageous to Justine's plans. Her expenses would be paid, she would have but little to do, and by exercising the influence over Florence which she already possessed, she might, it seemed, without difficulty, engage her in assisting her further views. All this was scheming, low-minded, and utterly without a thought of duty. Justine was young to have been led so far astray; but the progress of evil is fearfully swift, when it is begun early; and Justine had pursued a course of self-education, which is sure to be destructive of all right moral principle. She had read, heard, and thought of evil, till she had almost ceased to know that it was evil. The day-dreams in which Alice was once described as indulging, were the constant occupation of Justine's thoughts. She lived in a gay but sinful world of her own creating. In the midst of apparent occupation, she was still busy with her own fancies; and in hours of leisure she fed her imagination with books of the most pernicious kind. Justine's reading was indiscriminate. It mattered not what was the nature of the novels—however offensive to right feeling and good taste might be the scenes described—if they were only exciting, told in powerful language, and rousing deep interest, Justine was satisfied. She read them eagerly, thought of them, dreamt of them, and often supposed herself acting a principal part in the wickedness (for it was wickedness, however it

might be disguised) which had been delineated in the characters of others. Is Justine's case singular?

It was fortunate for Florence Trevelyan that these schemes were too important to be intrusted to her. Justine, indeed, made use of her, but she took care not to let her see that she did so. Such companionship, however, did Florence a great deal of harm. It taught her to speak lightly of things which were in themselves most sinful. It accustomed her to look upon evil as a matter of course; to suppose that all persons were alike, though some might appear better than others. Florence was not insensible to the influence of good, but Justine was teaching her to distrust its existence. She was so clever in detecting faults, and had such an amusing way of turning virtues into ridicule, that Florence could not but listen to and believe her.

"So you have had no answer from Mrs. Clifford," said Justine, as she and Florence walked up and down the verandah together, a few days after the invitation to the pic-nic had been sent.

"There was no occasion for one," replied Florence; "the engagement was made before, and my aunt merely wrote to fix the day. It is to be her party, in fact, though it is called a pic-nic."

"And there will be—how many?" asked Justine.

Florence ran over a long list of names, ending with, "It will be charming if we have only fine weather, and if Ruth will not be crotchety."

"What is that you call it?" said Justine; "it is a good word, just the word for Ruth. Crotchety—crooked that means, doesn't it; troublesome, that is exactly like her. But I am not much afraid of her."

"I never can understand you when you are speaking of Ruth," said Florence. "You used to say how good she was."

"Good! oh yes! every one is good."

"Nonsense, Justine, you don't mean that."

"Yes, every one is good when it suits."

Florence looked shocked.

"Now, not such a face as that, *mignonne*," said Justine, playfully. "You know I don't mean to talk scandal. Ruth is a paragon, but it is not for nothing; do you see?"

"No, I don't see at all," said Florence, shortly. "I always admired Ruth."

"Ah! to be sure. Admire her if you will; dress her up, call her a queen, put her on a crown; but then mark me—" Justine held up her finger with an arch smile—"Ruth likes the crown."

"Well! so we all should;" observed Florence.

"Of course; so we all should; I said it. You and I talk, sing, and play to Mrs. De Lacy; we are patterns; very sweet, very good-natured—she calls us angels. Then she takes us to France: we are content. Ruth says prayers, and reads sermons; she teaches dirty children, and cuts out baby frocks, and all the time she looks so—" and Justine folded her hands, and put on an absurd demure face, at which Florence burst into a fit of laughter; "then people say, 'Ah! she is a saint! Miss Ruth, she is so good.' Ruth knows she is praised; that is for her like going to France; she is content."

Florence still laughed.

"It is true; now say so," continued Justine.

"True! yes, perhaps. I wish you would not look so absurd," exclaimed Florence. "But we have forgotten one thing all this time; if you are to go to the pic-nic with us we shall meet Mrs. Clifford and Madeline, as well as Ruth, and then what is to become of us?"

"Nay, we are safe from Mrs. Clifford and Lady Catharine too. Mrs. Carter was kind enough in one

way ; she never told more tales than she could help, so they will not think about me if Ruth is silent."

"But if we were sure of that," said Florence,—
"there is Madeline."

"Ah! but I always took it for granted that 'la petite' had no will of her own. If we gained Ruth I thought there was no danger."

"That was if Ruth was quite firm in our cause ; but she is not. She says in her letter that she does not mean to keep her promise, and that I had much better break off all acquaintance with you ;—as if I should do such a thing !"

"As if you would do such a thing indeed !" repeated Justine, caressingly.

"But," continued Florence, "we must think about this. I don't feel at all sure that you will not be obliged to stay at home. I should not have cared about Lady Catharine and Mrs. Clifford any more than you, if Ruth and Madeline had been friends with us ; but I doubt very much now, whether it will do to run the risk."

"Mais pourquoi?" inquired Justine. "If we come over Ruth that will be all. Madeline is a nobody."

"Hem!" said Florence. "Madeline has queer ways of her own."

"But she is so simple, so good-natured."

Florence still looked doubtful. "Just remember one thing, Justine," she said ; "at school, do you recollect that little business about the brooch?"

"Ah, oui, assurément ; but what then? She was a baby ; she did not know any better."

"I would not answer for her," said Florence. "Madeline won't be come over."

"Trust me," said Justine, "I would turn her. You laugh ; but I would—I would turn her round my little finger."

"How?" inquired Florence.

"I would talk of good-nature; of being kind. I would beg her, as she loved me, not to mention Mrs. Carter. There are a hundred ways."

"You may try; but I doubt."

"Then you think her better than Ruth?" said Justine.

"No, I don't; at least I never think about her. I only know what Alice said."

"Alice! what was that?"

"When I first mentioned you to Alice, I asked her whether she thought Ruth and Madeline would keep the secret."

"Well?" exclaimed Justine, impatiently.

"Alice thought Ruth would," continued Florence. "She said that Ruth always listened to reason; but she had a doubt about Madeline, because Madeline never cared for reason."

"Ah! quelle folie!" exclaimed Justine. "I hoped she had been wiser."

"No, she is not. Alice says she is even worse than when she left school. If you remember, she had a way then of turning away when one talked to her. I don't know what it is in her, but she never seems to care for what other people care for."

"Not for being a queen, like that sober Ruth?" said Justine, laughing.

"No, one never could make her care; it was all the same who went before her. If Ruth and she were put down in the classes, Ruth used to stalk down to the bottom with such an air! I have often laughed to see her; but Madeline took it all quite quietly."

"That has nothing to do with the pic-nic," observed Justine.

"Yes, it has, somehow—I forget what I meant exactly—but it had something to do with it. Oh!

I remember. Don't you see that there is no coming over Madeline because she is so stupid?"

"Then she will do as Ruth tells her; she will not think for herself."

"I doubt; Maddy is obstinate. The day we first met her at the church, she would insist upon having her own way about not coming here—and she had it too. She did not come into the house."

"Happily for me," said Justine.

"Yes, happily for you; but if she sees you now at the pic-nic, it will not be happily for you or for me either."

Justine shrugged her shoulders. "Bien! we will hope—I don't fear."

"But if you were to stay away," suggested Florence, timidly. After the pic-nic there will be no danger. My aunt said yesterday, she meant to set off in a very few days."


Justine's lively face assumed rather a melancholy expression at the proposal. Whether she would have agreed to it or not is uncertain; for just then the question was set at rest by the appearance of Mrs. De Lacy, with the intelligence that Mrs. Clifford and Ruth intended to join the party to St. Cuthbert's; but that, for some unexplained reason, Madeline would remain at home. Justine clapped her hands in glee when she and Florence were again left together, and began dancing round the room, singing a French song, and stopping at intervals to declare that she was born under a fortunate star—she was always sure of getting out of difficulties—she was certain all would go just as they wished. Care! there was no such thing as care. Florence had seldom seen her in such high spirits. The mirth was infectious; it caught Mrs. De Lacy's ears, and she returned to the drawing-room. Justine exerted herself more and more to be agreeable, and Mrs. De

Lacy, fascinated by her agreeable manners and quick talent, came to the conclusion, before the day was over, that she would no longer hesitate to engage Justine Le Vergnier, to be a companion for herself and a governess for her child.

CHAPTER XXI.


ALICE returned to the Manor, after her evening walk with Mr. Clifford, in a different frame of mind from that in which she had left it. She was subdued, saddened; pride and resentment were no longer striving in the same degree for the mastery over her better feelings. Alice was, as Mr. Clifford had described her when speaking to Lady Catharine, candid; and this candour was the groundwork of much good. Whilst Mr. Clifford was talking she was indeed cold, and now and then even repulsive in her manner; but his words sank into her heart, and she owned their truth. Still Alice did not condemn herself without casting some reproach upon others. She thought of her school-days, and remembered her evil companions; her errors might in some degree be attributed to them; and now—Alice was fully occupied in dwelling upon this “now,” as she walked home from the Parsonage, followed by the butler, who had been sent to take care of her;—now, there were many things to try her; many circumstances to render her duties disagreeable and discouraging. The duties in themselves might be easy to others, but they could never, she imagined, be so to her.

These thoughts were crowding upon her mind as she passed the lodge gate, and entered the avenue. The house, at its extremity, looked cheerless in the bright moonlight, for the windows appeared like so many closed eyes, and there were no lights to be seen, except from a small pantry window crossed with iron bars. Alice’s heart sank as she drew near. The



Parsonage, notwithstanding its low rooms and worn furniture, possessed infinitely greater charms in her eyes than the handsome Manor House, whilst the pride she had once felt in her position, as Lady Catharine's adopted child, and the expectation of an ample, if not a large fortune, was fast melting away under the influence of daily vexations. Alice was not altogether to blame in these feelings. God does not see fit to give us all the same blessings in our youth. Many be the places in homes where they find little sympathy and great trials. It is not true that childhood and youth are always the happiest seasons of life. Alice Lennox had much to bear. Her warm affections were frequently chilled; her freedom was checked; the natural impulses of her age and disposition were thwarted. She was like a bird confined in a cage, and fluttering vainly against the wires, in the longing desire to escape.

The desire was not in itself wrong; and this was Alice's temptation and her difficulty. She walked on slowly, unwilling to reach the grave old Manor House, associated as it was with ideas of constraint, coldness, and formality, and feeling herself depressed even to tears. Now and then she stopped to watch the effects of the pale gleaming light upon the trunks, and beneath the branches of the beech trees in the avenue; or bent down to look at a glowworm shining from amongst the moss and turf. She was free then,—free till she had passed the heavy barred door, which at that moment seemed the entrance to a prison. Why,—the thought crossed her mind with a sharp pang,—why could she not remain so? The answer, or at least the thought which could have satisfied her, might have been suggested at that moment, if Alice had had the heart and the understanding to discover it. As she pursued her way, the moon passed from behind a cloud,



and shed a flood of light upon her path. Alice's eye was attracted by it, she looked up to the sky, studded with myriads of stars; a few dark shadows were passing across it, edged with silver by the moon-beams, but they were no barrier. She could pass beyond them, and rest her glance upon worlds more distant than imagination could realize. Infinity was above her, boundless space around her; but she was not free to travel through it. She was placed upon a speck in the universe, born into one small world, kept a prisoner in a corner of that world; she was constantly reminded that it was not in her power to do all she wished, by the feeling of fatigue, by weather, by events over which she had no control, by the very formation of her body; yet it had never entered Alice's mind to murmur because she was a human being. As she was formed, so she was contented to remain. God's will was her will in these things—at least she had never thought of rebelling against it: She never strove to be free; to fly through the air, or walk upon the water; and therefore she was not fretted by the impossibility. When we have learnt this same lesson in our several positions in life; when God's will has become our will, so that we have no wish beyond our station; no desire to escape from the trials He sends; no longings but for the daily bread and the daily comforts which He in His wisdom apports us: then we are free.

Alice had a hard lesson to learn, but it is well to "bear the yoke in our youth;" for so we are prepared for the restraints to which (if we hope for happiness) we must be accustomed in age.

But the door was reached. Alice stood upon the steps, and cast one lingering melancholy glance upon the beauty of the moonlight evening before she entered the hall, which was gloomy from its size, and the dark colour of the wainscot, notwithstanding the light

from the large glass lamp that hung suspended from the ceiling. Lady Catharine, she was told, was in the breakfast-room ; her usual sitting-room when alone. A disagreeable recollection of the manner in which they last parted came upon Alice rather suddenly. She had been dreaming for the last quarter of an hour ; now she was to prepare herself for reality. Lady Catharine was sitting with her back to the door reading, when Alice came in. She thought it was only the servant bringing an answer to some message, and she did not look up. Alice advanced to the table, took off her gloves, and untied her bonnet, before Lady Catharine raised her eyes.

Then she said, " Oh ! my dear, are you returned ? is it a fine evening ? "

" Yes, ma'am, very. "

" You must have had a pleasant walk. "

" Yes, ma'am, very. "

" Did Mr. Clifford come with you ? "

" No, ma'am. "

A pause. Alice unpinned her shawl.

" Shall I take my things off before prayers ? " she asked.

" Yes, you had better. "

Alice lighted a candle and departed. When she came down the bell was rung ; the servants assembled in the ante-room to the drawing-room, Lady Catherine sat down to a small table, and read a chapter from a large family Bible. Alice sat by her, with her eyes bent upon her own Bible, and her thoughts wandering in innumerable directions. Then followed prayers, then a kiss, and then separation for the night.

Alice was very unhappy when she went to bed, from several causes : Mr. Clifford's conversation, Lady Catharine's coldness, and a misgiving that her troubles were not entirely independent of herself.

But Lady Catharine was equally so; she had expected some advance from Alice, some allusion to the morning vexations, which should give an opening to the words, "I forgive;" but Alice appeared insensible and forgetful. Lady Catharine owned the truth of a great deal which Mr. Clifford had suggested, but it could never, she thought, be desirable to show cordiality unless there were some symptoms of repentance. She could not resolve upon what line of conduct to adopt. Mr. Clifford's ideas were contrary to all her early prejudices, and though she bore with the mention of them, as she knew they appeared to him to be right, she could not in a moment throw off her own plans and pursue his. And with Lady Catharine, as with Alice, there was a difficulty in the way of perceiving her errors, from the fact that Alice was really in fault—that she really was negligent and self-willed. But neither was Lady Catharine aware of the effect of her own manner. She did not mean to be chilling or formal; but the manner had been allowed to grow up in youth unchecked, and now it was a part of her very nature. As a girl, she had been accustomed to say, "I know I am proud; I cannot help being reserved; I dare say people think me very cold;" all the time with a certain satisfaction in being proud, and cold, and reserved, from an idea that she was therefore unlike ordinary persons. No one had said to her that proud, cold manners were greatly to be lamented and struggled against; that they were great defects, and symptoms of an evil nature: no one had warned her that reserve, when indulged, is apt to degenerate into want of consideration for the feelings of our friends; and that, when we shut ourselves up, and fancy that others cannot understand us, we too often do not take the trouble to understand them. Coldness and reserve are not the characteristics of a Christian.

Without reference to the One Perfect Example of infinite charity, we can scarcely imagine St. Paul repelling, when the disciples threw themselves upon his neck and wept, "sorrowing most of all that they should see his face no more." And when St. John gave his last touching exhortation, "Little children, love one another," surely the tone and manner must have been winning even as the words, for they were the tone and manner of him "whom Jesus loved."

But Lady Catharine's austerity was now almost beyond correction. It might be softened, but there was little hope of its ever being eradicated. The best that could be expected was, that her excellent qualities, her sincerity, earnestness, and genuine benevolence, might exercise so great an influence as to induce those with whom she associated to overlook the occasional harshness of her manner. Alice was too young, too selfish, too impatient, to do this; and, above all, she was not yet sufficiently humble.

No, Alice was not really humble, even on that evening when she had been listening to Mr. Clifford's advice, and had been warned that she was not fit for Confirmation. A repining spirit cannot be a humble one. When we have learnt to know ourselves, we shall never murmur. Sinners by nature—helpless, hopeless; offending daily and hourly, after grace given for the present and boundless happiness offered for the future, what claim have we to any blessings? If Alice's lot in life had been ten times more trying, she would still have had cause for the gratitude of every moment of her existence. But she could not see this. She fancied her conduct excused by circumstances, and when she reflected on all which Mr. Clifford had said, her meditations took the form of an examination of Lady Catharine's conduct, and her resolution was to be better if Lady Catharine would be kinder. God does not accept such resolutions.

We must be good under any circumstances—tempted or not tempted, happy or not happy.

They met at breakfast the next morning, still with constraint on both sides. Alice fearing and wondering whether Mr. Clifford had positively proposed to Lady Catharine to delay her confirmation. Lady Catharine pondering how to break through the ice of Alice's reserve. Lady Catharine began a conversation several times, and extracted in reply that Alice had spent a quiet day at the Parsonage, seen no one, and only walked on the shore. No parish news; no remarks about the school; no mention of any chance visitor. Alice was as short and correct in her answers as if she had been placed in a witness box. Lady Catharine tried another subject—Mrs. De Lacy's visit. Alice showed little interest in it, except by once asking for Florence. Lady Catharine believed she was quite well. A young lady was staying with her; that was the reason she had not accompanied her aunt. Then Alice's eyes brightened, as if the subject was not quite indifferent to her; but Lady Catharine was not quick in remarking slight variations of countenance.

"I think Mrs. De Lacy said she was French," continued Lady Catharine. "I am not fond myself of intimacies with foreigners. They are all alike, educated frivolously."

Alice could not bear this sweeping censure, and observed that she supposed some might be better.

"That is because you don't know them, my dear. I should be sorry for you to be thrown in the way of them."

Alice did not venture to allude to Justine Le Vergnier.

"By-the-bye," added Lady Catharine, "it is rather strange—I wonder—" She finished her sentence in her own mind, and immediately began to finish her

breakfast also ; deliberately—she was never hurried out of her sense of propriety in all things—yet with that air of determination which shows that persons are not intending to spend more time upon what they are doing than can be avoided. On rising from the table, Alice was told to ring the bell, that the breakfast things might be removed ; to send word to the gardener that Lady Catharine desired to speak with him in a quarter of an hour precisely ; to go herself and arrange some fresh flowers in the drawing-room vases—a duty which Alice always performed directly after breakfast—then to walk on the terrace for three quarters of an hour, and on her re-entrance to read history for an hour, and write any letters which might be necessary. Also to beg Marsham to give her some articles of dress which were not in good repair, and which she had better mend before she finished her crochet bag ; also—but Lady Catharine could not remember any more “alsos,” though she stood thinking for several seconds. Alice did not stand at all. The moment Lady Catharine was gone she rushed away—ran up the stairs, two steps at a time—hurried along the gallery, and having reached her own room, slammed the door, bolted it, and walked up and down in a state of fretful irritation. It was unfortunate that Alice had no one to remind her—that she had not the sense to remind herself—of the fact that the duties imposed upon her were very simple and easily performed ; that if she had been left to herself, she could scarcely have portioned out her morning better. The sole fault to be found with the arrangement being that it had been made for her instead of by her. Alice had only to subdue her own will, and all discomfort would have been at an end. The duties however, must, she knew, be performed, and so they were. A short time afterwards, as she returned to her room laden with flowers for the drawing-room

vases, she found Lady Catharine there. Alice's mind was still in a storm. Lady Catharine was only quietly grave; at least such was her tone of voice when she said,—

"Were you aware, Alice, that Miss Trevelyan had a friend staying with her?"

Alice replied that she had heard so.

"You cannot have seen her," said Lady Catharine; "but have you any idea where she comes from?"

"I am not sure where she lives," said Alice, whilst, sorely against her wishes, the colour rose in her cheeks.

"Mrs. De Lacy did not give her name," said Lady Catharine, "and you say you have not heard it?"

A sudden jerk of Alice's elbow threw down the jug of water which stood upon the table, and in the confusion which this occasioned she escaped answering the question.

"I dare say you will wonder why I ask," continued Lady Catharine, with something more of ease; "but I have received a particular caution from Mrs. Carter against your renewing an acquaintance with that Mademoiselle Le Vergnier, whom you knew at school. She has a very bad opinion of her. It was not worth while to mention this before; but hearing of Miss Trevelyan's friend made me think it possible that she might be the same person. Miss Trevelyan would of course have told you if she had been?"

Alice was silent; but the pang of conscience which she endured was almost intolerable.

"I wonder I did not think of asking Mrs. De Lacy more about her," said Lady Catharine, speaking to herself; "but" (and she sighed) "I was occupied with other things. Well, my dear, there is no occasion to keep you any longer doing nothing,"—for

Alice had not yet begun to dress the flowers;—"I merely wished to say to you that if Miss Trevelyan should ever offer to introduce you again to that Mademoiselle Le Vergnier, you must remember that both Mrs. Carter and I entirely disapprove of the acquaintance. You would, however, of course, tell me directly. And, Alice, I am not particularly desirous of your becoming a great friend of Miss Trevelyan's. Mrs. Carter's account does not entirely please me. By and by we will have some of your real friends here." After the Confirmation—Lady Catharine was going to add, but she was checked by a painful remembrance, and turning from the subject abruptly, she said, "You walked on the shore last night, my dear; was Mr. Clifford with you?"

"Yes, ma'am, part of the time."

"Did he appear in good spirits?"

Alice looked surprised, and answered, "Yes, ma'am, much the same as usual."

Lady Catharine seemed inclined to do what for her was very unnatural—to linger in the room without any apparent motive. Alice began arranging the flowers.

"Did Mr. Clifford walk with you?" said Lady Catharine, in the same sudden manner, and forgetting that she had put a similar question only a few moments before.

"Yes, ma'am."

"But with you—with you alone?"

"We sat some time on the shore together," said Alice, colouring.

"That was what I meant. Had he any opportunity of speaking to you by yourself?"

"We talked," replied Alice, the slight tinge which had flushed her face becoming a deep crimson.

"I see," continued Lady Catharine, looking stea-

dily at her, "Mr. Clifford has said to you what he said to me. Alice, can you imagine how grieved I am?"

Alice's heart swelled for an instant with pride, but the tone and the word "grieved" softened her. "Mr. Clifford did not tell me exactly—he did not say I must not go," she replied, speaking in a low voice, and in her nervousness undoing all her work, and scattering the flowers upon the table.

For once Lady Catharine omitted to notice her awkwardness. "But he must have told you," she said, "that he had doubts upon the subject; and in such cases a doubt is almost equal to a certainty."

Alice did not see this. She replied coldly, that if Lady Catharine and Mr. Clifford both thought it better not, she supposed it would be so.

This answer apparently perplexed Lady Catharine. "And is your confirmation then a matter of indifference to you, Alice?" she asked.

"I wish to go," replied Alice, speaking in the same manner.

Lady Catharine seized upon the word "wish," and said, eagerly, "If you wished, all would be right. Did you tell Mr. Clifford this?"

"Yes."

Silence followed. Lady Catharine stood before the picture of Mrs. Lennox, and as she looked upon it, tears gathered in her cold, grey eyes, but they went no farther. Before Alice, in her present mood, she would have felt it humiliation to betray any weakness. Alice glanced at her from time to time. The work in which she was engaged made no progress; the flowers were altered again and again, and the stems cut and re-cut, whilst her thoughts were wandering to her mother and Lady Catharine's affection for her, and conscience was bitterly upbraiding her for her deception about Justine. One word of gentleness,

and the barrier of her pride might have been broken down; but it did not come. They had met coldly—they parted coldly. Lady Catharine went to her room without uttering another word, and Alice set about her morning's work, with no interest in it beyond that of merely passing away a few heavy hours, and preventing herself from thinking that she had practically told an untruth. Time did pass away; and Alice, if she had thought at all, might have been grateful to Lady Catharine for giving her so much to do. The luncheon bell rang, and she was surprised that the morning had gone so quickly. It would have been more agreeable to her to escape luncheon altogether; but this was not practicable; and it proved less unpleasant than she had anticipated. Lady Catharine also had been occupied, and in her occupation found less leisure to think about Alice. She brought forward a topic for conversation which was tolerably free from unpleasant associations; but Alice could not be cheerful. She could overlook her ordinary faults; but the miserable deception of which she had been guilty was a weight not to be shaken off. She was thoroughly ashamed of it—more ashamed perhaps than penitent, and could only relieve her mind by thinking that she should, in the course of the afternoon, have an opportunity of telling Ruth, as there was a quarterly examination at the school, to which she was going with Lady Catharine, and where Ruth would certainly be present.

CHAPTER XXII.

MUCH to the disappointment of Alice, Madeline was at the school instead of her sister. A head-ache kept Ruth at home, and Madeline was obliged to take her place. The afternoon was very warm, and the heat soon became oppressive. After a short time Lady Catharine declared herself unable to bear it any longer, and, leaving Alice with Mr. Clifford, she went home. The departure was satisfactory to Alice, who took a part in the examination of one of the classes, and received Mr. Clifford's thanks and approval. At any other time this circumstance would have raised her spirits; for such praises were rarely given; but, when they were, they were given heartily. Praise and sympathy went together, and the latter made the former ten times more valuable. Mr. Clifford's manner of thanking Alice had also a peculiar meaning in it. Alice understood that he was thinking of what had passed between them the day before, and was pleased to find that in one duty, and that an important one, she had not been remiss.

When the school was dismissed, Madeline congratulated Alice, and begged her, if possible, to come back with her to the Parsonage. Ruth would be delighted, she said, to know that she had been praised by her papa—he was so very particular; and her mamma also would be very glad: it was only a few days before, that she had been saying how regular Alice was in going to the school, and that she was a good example to them.

Alice scarcely smiled, though she agreed to return

to the Parsonage, hoping that she might be able to have a little conversation with Ruth before the dinner hour at the Manor.

The distance from the school to the Parsonage was but short; but it was lengthened now by Madeline's proposing that they should cross some fields to take a message to a cottager for her papa.

Alice made no objection, though she was looking forward to seeing Ruth, as the only hope of relieving her burdened mind.

Madeline was by this time pretty well accustomed to Alice's temper, but her silence on the present occasion certainly puzzled her. She, who valued her papa's praises so much, imagined of course that Alice must be happy when she had received them. Madeline had felt rather lonely the last few days; Ruth was grown strangely reserved; her papa had been more thoughtful than usual; and now Alice was what she called in "a mood." There was one person, however, whom nothing seemed to alter; and when Madeline caught sight of her mamma standing at the cottage door, as they came up, she ran up to her with delight.

Madeline went into the cottage, and Mrs. Clifford and Alice remained together. The coldest person must have been struck by Mrs. Clifford's manner; so affectionate and sympathising, and full of consideration. Even when she merely asked whether Alice was going to the Parsonage, she contrived to give an interest to her words. The simple question was not put as a matter of course, it evidently implied that she wished her to go. The charm of Mrs. Clifford's character consisted not only in the absence of all selfishness, but in the power of throwing herself, as it were, into the minds of those with whom she held intercourse; seeing with their eyes, hearing with their ears, and, in consequence, giving real sympathy in

cases where it would seem she could not naturally be at all concerned.

Mrs. Clifford had taught herself this habit of mind. She was indeed born with an affectionate, gentle temper, but she had improved it by watchfulness. One command given in the Bible made a great impression upon her when she was quite young. It was St. Paul's exhortation to the Romans to "rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." She heard sympathy generally spoken of as a gift, or disposition of the heart, like warmth of feeling; but she perceived that this was not St. Paul's view of it. If it could not be attained by practice, it would not be commanded. Mrs. Clifford did practise. She began at once, in the minute affairs of every day; whether it were choosing a dress, or reading a book, or laying out a flower-bed; whatever came before her, as occupying the attention of those she lived with, was (though not without an effort at first) forced to engage her attention also. Now, this disposition of mind was brought to bear upon really important subjects, and perhaps not even Mr. Clifford, with his zeal, firmness, and power of mind, possessed as much influence over his parishioners as did his gentle wife when she sat by their lowly firesides, listening to their tales of suffering, leading them to tell their secret trials, and at last leaving them with perhaps a very few words of advice, and scarcely any of reproof, but with the assurance so touching to us all: "Yes, I can quite understand; it must be very sad—very hard to bear; we will think about it, and see if something cannot be done."

Mrs. Clifford could and would have been a constant support to Alice in her home trials; but under Alice's peculiar circumstances there was a great difficulty. If Alice was to be happy, Lady Catharine must be her chief object of respect and affection. Mrs.

Clifford might win her affections, but this would only make her uncomfortable by withdrawing her interest from the person in whom it ought to be centred.

It was probable, also, that Lady Catharine might be of a jealous disposition, especially where she had so few to love ; and if this feeling were once roused, Alice would inevitably be wretched. All these considerations made Mrs. Clifford very guarded in their intercourse ; yet it was impossible to watch Alice, and know her faults and her trials, without great pity, and an earnest desire to be of service to her. Many of Ruth's suggestions were the result of previous conversation with her mamma ; and often, when Mrs. Clifford was busy or wearied, she would exert herself to talk to her own children about Alice, hoping through them to do good, without awakening any irritable feeling on the part of Lady Catharine.

Just now Mrs. Clifford was peculiarly compassionate towards Alice. She knew what had been said regarding her confirmation, and she understood better than her husband all that Alice would have to bear, both from her own regret and Lady Catharine's displeasure, if the delay was to be insisted on. It struck her immediately that Alice looked pale, and she enquired as tenderly as if speaking to one of her own children, whether she was tired ; adding : " I am afraid Mr. Clifford has kept you too long at the school, my dear ; and Madeline was foolish in bringing you so far round."

Poor Alice's heavy heart received an additional weight from these few kind words. She would not own that she was tired, but said she should like to go to the Parsonage and talk a little to Ruth.

" Do, my dear ; Ruth will be delighted. You will find her in my dressing-room, lying on the sofa ; her head is better now."

Alice looked with some impatience at the cottage-door, wondering that Madeline did not come out.

"You are in a hurry, are you not, my love? You want to see Ruth, and go back to the Manor in time to dress for dinner. I will hurry Madeline;" and Mrs. Clifford entered the cottage.

Alice remained at the door, not exactly listening to what was said, but gathering a vague impression of some more kind words—some further thought for the comfort of others. Mrs. Clifford appeared more loveable than ever, and Alice longed—how earnestly! how sadly! that such a mother had been granted to herself. Madeline came out full of excitement at the wonderful recovery of a sick child, a particular favourite of hers; and Mrs. Clifford would not check her at first, but when her energy had a little subsided, she said:—

"Madeline, dear, you have brought Alice too far; she is tired; take her home the short way, and then leave her with Ruth for a little while to rest. And, Alice," she added, "do you think that Lady Catharine would spare you to us again the day after to-morrow? We have not seen you as often lately as I like."

Alice was only too glad of the invitation, though a little afraid of another tête-à-tête with Mr. Clifford. They were to separate now, as Mrs. Clifford had business in a contrary direction. Madeline was told to order some broth for the child when she reached home—an order which pleased her in itself, and reminded her that her mamma cared for those whom she cared for; and Alice was kissed, and begged to bring a bright colour in her cheek the day after to-morrow, or they should have to prescribe for her also.

"Let Ruth and Alice be quiet together, my dear Madeline," was Mrs. Clifford's last injunction; "and

keep watch for Alice, that she may not be late in going back."

"Are you not well, Alice?" said Madeline, when her mamma had left them.

"Yes, tolerably; my head is aching a little, but that is all; it was the heat of the school, I think. My headaches are not like Ruth's."

"Ruth is quite out of spirits," observed Madeline; "in that way she is like you. I cannot think where the spirits of both of you are gone."

"There is nothing to give one spirits that I can see," replied Alice.

"Ruth is grave about the Confirmation sometimes," said Madeline; "but that would not make her unhappy, and really now and then she looks as if she could cry."

"I am not going to the Confirmation, Madeline," said Alice. This was spoken quietly, but Alice's step was hurried. Madeline stopped, and looked at her in perfect incredulity.

"I am not going to the Confirmation," repeated Alice, still hurrying on.

"Not going here, do you mean?—at this place?—Laneton? Shall you be confirmed any where else?"

"I shall not be confirmed at all," continued Alice. "Your papa says so," she added, with some bitterness of tone.

"Oh! Alice, how dreadful!"

Madeline did not know how to finish the sentence.

"I cannot help it," said Alice.

"But don't you care? I cannot understand you; you seem quite changed."

"I am changed," exclaimed Alice, passionately.

"I am so miserable; I shall never be happy."

"Alice, dear! how can you talk so? Please don't hurry on. I would give anything to make you

better—happier, I mean. Please, Alice, wait one minute for me.”

They had reached a stile, which divided the field from the premises of the Parsonage. Alice crossed it, but instead of going into the house, she turned into a path which led into the garden. Madeline followed her. They sat down together on a bench in the arbour, at the end of the path, and Madeline saw that Alice was crying bitterly. For a little time Madeline showed her sympathy only by manner; but, at last, she said :

“If we were to go into the house to Ruth, perhaps you would be able to talk to her.”

“I came on purpose,” said Alice. “I did not mean to say anything to you, Madeline; I cannot think how it came out. I knew you would be shocked.”

“But,” said Madeline, not liking to confess really how much shocked she felt, “if you would explain yourself more, I should be very glad. I never heard anything about it before. Does papa really mean it?”

“He says it,” replied Alice.

“And does Lady Catharine consent?”

“Yes, I believe she does. Madeline,”—and Alice’s voice became lower,—“what will you think of me, when you are confirmed and I am not?”


“I shall love you always, dearly,” said Madeline, eagerly.

“But you would despise me?”

“Oh no, Alice, I should be very sorry; but I am not at all good myself.”

“Yes, you are good,” said Alice, decidedly.

“No, indeed, indeed; Alice, you mistake. It seems, sometimes, as if I could never do anything I ought.”



"Sometimes!" repeated Alice. "It seems so always with me, and I am wretched."

"But," continued Madeline, "you need not be."

"Yes, if I never grow better, I must be."

"But persons always grow better when they say their prayers properly," said Madeline.

"I always do say my prayers," replied Alice.

This acknowledgment had the effect of silencing Madeline for a short space; but, after a little consideration, she said:

"Papa tells me I must be patient with myself."

"He does not tell me so," said Alice. "He declares I have no resolution."

"But I don't think papa knows," began Madeline, —stopping however before the sentence was ended, from the fear lest it should be wrong to suppose her papa did not know everything;—"that is, I am sure, Alice, you can do more things than you imagine. You say you cannot draw, or play, or do a great many things which Ruth and I see you can do; and so it may be with being good."

"That does not help me," said Alice.

Madeline saw that she was not giving any real comfort, and wished that Alice would offer to go indoors to Ruth.

"What makes you good, Madeline?" said Alice, abruptly.

"I am not good."

"Yes you are; don't say you are not. You are good; what makes you so?"

"I don't know; God makes all people good."

"Except wicked people like me; so that is no answer. What makes you good?"

"But it is the Holy Spirit," said Madeline, reverently, "who gives us good thoughts; and you know, Alice, we are both alike. We have both been baptized."



"Yes;" and Alice began to think; "and heaps of people have been baptized too. Why are they not all good?"

"No one can tell," replied Madeline; "they ought to be."

"But they are not—why are they not?"

Madeline could find no answer.

"Then some baptized people are good, and some are wicked," said Alice. "I am one of the wicked ones; that is why I am not to be confirmed."

"You must have some very wrong notions," continued Madeline, her earnestness overcoming the timidity of her character. "We are both alike. Baptism made us alike."

"It did not make me good," said Alice.

Madeline's face suddenly brightened.

"It did not make me good," she replied; "but it was the beginning of giving me a power to be so; though, Alice, you know I did not make the use of it I might. We were naughty together as children."

"Yet the difference now;—how did it come?" exclaimed Alice, impatiently, though with an air of thought; for Madeline's reference to the faults of her childhood had given her a feeling of hope for herself. Madeline did not like to answer; she could not allow the difference upon which Alice so strongly insisted.

"Tell me, Maddy—please tell me," said Alice.

"Oh! I would give all the world to be good."


Madeline threw her arms round her.

"That must be good, Alice; you know wishes are given us."

"But I don't care for wishes. What did you do? How did you begin?"

"I used to pray," said Madeline, "but the words were uttered with difficulty."

Alice's face again became overcast.



"Perhaps, though, you mean what little things did I do?" continued Madeline.

"Yes; that is, I don't know exactly what I mean; but something more than saying prayers generally. One knows that to be right."

"I cannot quite think what I did, when I began," said Madeline. "It was a long time back, and I am always doing wrong now. I know I used to say prayers at school in the dressing-room; that, I think, did me good—short prayers, at odd times, and standing up, because you know I should have been interrupted."

"Did you indeed say prayers then?" enquired Alice, with a look of astonishment.

"Yes; I don't remember what it was that put it into my head—I think it was something Mrs. Carter said one day, about making good resolutions. At first I went just when I thought about it, and not quite every day; but, by-and-by, it seemed to be natural to go, just as it is to say one's prayers at night; and I fixed an hour—five o'clock it was, when school was over, and I never missed it, if I could possibly help it."

"But what did you say?" enquired Alice. "Were you never interrupted? and could you think?"

"I was frightened very often," replied Madeline; "and now and then persons came in and sent my thoughts all away; but I hoped I should be forgiven if I tried. They were prayers out of my own head which I began with, only a few words; but I met with one or two short ones in a book, which I liked, and then I used to say them; only I altered them if I liked it—if I had anything particular to say."

"Well!" said Alice, "go on."

"That was the beginning," continued Madeline, "and it made me happier; but I had so many faults, such a great, great many; I used to try and recollect

them at night, but I had not time; the candles were taken away so soon."

"And I remember," said Alice, "you were always scolded for being in bed late."

"Yes; it used to worry me a great deal. I could not quite tell what it was right to do; at last I managed differently."

"Differently! how?" said Alice.

"I used to divide the day," replied Madeline. "When I went to the dressing-room at five o'clock, I thought about what I had been doing till then, and said I was sorry, in my prayers; and afterwards, at bed-time, I had not so much to think about."

"That was not dividing the day well," observed Alice; "it was too long till five o'clock."

"No, but I could not help myself; I could not find time before, and I was obliged to make things suit as well as I could. You know I could not leave my lessons."

"And when you had found out your faults, what did you do next?" enquired Alice.

"I knew I must try to do what was right, besides trying to get rid of the faults," replied Madeline; "so I made up my mind to begin pleasing Mrs. Carter, if I could, all day long."

"All the day!" repeated Alice, with a sigh of weariness at the very thought of such constant exertion.

"Yes; but it was very hard. Once I remember having such a dreadful feeling just for a moment."

Alice fixed her eyes upon her with increasing interest.

"It was in our bed-room, I shall never forget it," said Madeline. "I was left the last, and I wanted to go down stairs to practise, but the room was untidy, and I knew I ought to stay; and I began putting it in order, and just as I thought I had finished,

I saw that the books on the drawers were not straight. It was a very little thing, but I went back to put them right, because Mrs. Carter always liked to see them neat; then it came over me, a sort of weight, the thought that I must go on all my life, never having any rest or peace, that there would be always something to be done."

"Yes, always something," escaped from Alice, involuntarily.

"But Alice, I don't mean that the feeling lasted," exclaimed Madeline; "and I will tell you presently how I became a great deal happier."

"But about that always trying," said Alice; "it must be such terrible hard work."

"So it was at the beginning," replied Madeline; "but I found it would not do to leave off; I was wretched when I did, and after a very little time it became natural to be careful."

"I don't see how that could be," observed Alice.

"It was a habit," said Madeline. "At first I was obliged to think, and force myself to recollect that things were wrong; such things as dawdling, and talking idly, and speaking hastily; but when I had stopped myself tolerably often, I found that I used to check myself almost without thinking; the notion of its being wrong came in an instant, without my exactly endeavouring to make it come."

"That is hard to understand," said Alice.

"If you would begin you would know what I mean. Don't you know, when we were little children, and learnt to use a knife and fork, how careful we were obliged to be lest we should cut our fingers? Well! now we never think about it; and so it seems, in a way, with doing right. If one begins in being particular in everything it becomes a habit."

"And now about your being happier," said Alice.

"Ah! that was when I returned home. Papa

made me happier. He gave me notions. I think, Alice, if you could have them, you would never say it was hard to be good."

"Well, but tell me; make haste, what were they?" said Alice.

"It was only one notion, really, but it did for everything," replied Madeline. "I was one day talking to papa; we were speaking about being good, and I told him how hard I found it, and that sometimes I was quite tired of trying; and he said, that if I would only believe that our Saviour was our Friend, and loved us when we tried, it would all be easy. Something came over me then,—a curious feeling, but it made me very happy,—as if I was not to work hard at being good like a lesson, but to please some one I loved; and it was so pleasant, it made all the world bright; I can quite remember how light-hearted I felt. The minute afterwards I was obliged to leave papa, and go in-doors, though I wished to stay very much, but I went directly without waiting an instant, and it was no hardship, because I thought that I was doing it to please a Friend, and that if I could see Him perhaps He would be smiling upon me as papa does when we have done anything he likes. Don't you see, Alice, how nice it is to think one has to please a Friend?"

"Yes, yes, indeed, if one could!" exclaimed Alice. "Still you know, Madeline, there is the old story, one never is good—that is, I am not; and then it is no use to think in that way."

"But a Friend," said Madeline—and as she spoke an expression of gladness and hope lighted up her young face—"a Friend loves one always. When I have done wrong I am wretched till I think of that, and then it all comes right; and when I say I am sorry, I am really very sorry, and I wish with all my heart to do better."

"But suppose you go wrong again in the same way?" said Alice.

"Still it is a Friend that one has to go to," replied Madeline. "Nothing ever seems to do away with that. It is as if one had a claim; I don't mean that exactly," she added, slightly blushing; "but don't you know one has a sort of claim upon one's relations, one is sure they will be more kind than other people; and we were all made, in a way, our Saviour's relations when we were baptized."

"Yes, I never thought about that before," said Alice; "not in the same words. Yet I don't think I could ever get it into my head properly that our Saviour was our Friend."

"Oh, Alice! not when you read the gospels?"

Alice only sighed. She read the gospels as a history with great reverence, but the personal application to herself had scarcely ever been made. Madeline had thrown a new light upon them, though quite unconsciously, for all that she said was natural to her, and a part of her every-day thoughts.

Madeline observed Alice's silence, and, fancying that she had wearied her, proposed that she should go and see about Ruth and her headache, adding, that it was selfish to have kept Alice from her so long.

Alice assented; not that she was tired of the conversation, for it had given a new and happier turn to her thoughts; but there were some subjects upon which Ruth only could give her advice.

CHAPTER XXIII.

RUTH was not looking well, yet she did not appear to require sympathy. She was excited at seeing Alice, and in a great hurry that Madeline should leave them together. Alice thought this might be from pleasure in seeing her; but Ruth's first question when they were alone disappointed her. It was whether she was going to the pic-nic. Alice replied Yes, she believed so, and would have gone on to speak of Florence and Justine; but Ruth prevented her by saying,

"Of course, Madeline has told you about herself?"

"Told me! no—what?"

"That she is not going," replied Ruth, and before Alice could make a remark, she added hurriedly, "She thinks it better not, and you know she is very good."

"But a pic-nic!" exclaimed Alice. "What possible harm can there be in a pic-nic? People object to balls and theatres, I know; but what can any one find fault with in a pic-nic?"

"Madeline only cares just now," said Ruth; her tone of forced indifference showing that she did not intend to enter into a further explanation if it could be avoided.

"Just now—just now!" said Alice, with a perplexed air.

"Yes; cannot you understand? How dull you must be."

"Just now!" again repeated Alice.

"Yes, just now, because of the Confirmation."

Alice became very grave, and made no remark in reply.

"What have you been doing at the school this afternoon?" enquired Ruth.

"So Madeline will not go because of the Confirmation," observed Alice, after a pause, and unheeding the question. "That is your papa's wish, I suppose?"

"No, Madeline's alone."

"Madeline is very much in earnest," remarked Alice. "One cannot help respecting her."

"Yes, she is a great darling. She sets a very good example," said Ruth.

"It is not merely that; other people set good examples. But I will tell you what I always feel about Madeline—that she only wishes for one thing. Other persons like their own ways,—I like mine very much;—but Madeline has only one way; she only wants to do right."

"I think that is true," said Ruth.

"She has been telling me about herself," continued Alice; "how she first began to be good. It seemed all very simple and easy. When she was talking, I thought I might be good myself some day."

"You are in such a hurry," said Ruth. "You despair in a moment."

"Then I am only like your papa and Lady Catharine," exclaimed Alice, speaking quickly, and casting her eyes upon the ground. "They declare I am not fit to be confirmed."

"Oh, Alice!" Ruth could say no more; she raised herself from her reclining posture, and regarded Alice in much astonishment, not unmixed with horror.

"You may well say, 'Oh, Alice!' I knew you would be shocked. I made up my mind so before I came; but it is true. Your papa says so, and Lady

Catharine ; and they think that I shall never come to any good."

Ruth could hardly keep from a smile ; for she knew this must be an exaggeration. " Now, Alice dear," she said, in a soothing tone, " don't fret yourself into such a fuss all in a moment ; just tell me quietly what you mean. Papa does not say that you are not to be confirmed, does he ?"

" All but," replied Alice, and then becoming calmer, she tried to collect her thoughts, and told Ruth, as well as she could remember, the substance of what had passed upon the subject both with Mr. Clifford and Lady Catharine.

Ruth's judgment not being warped by personal feelings, she saw at once that her papa did not intend to debar Alice from confirmation, if only her mind could be brought into a right state of preparation, and when Alice had finished speaking, she placed her own view of the case before her. Alice was not free from perverseness. She found rather a satisfaction in believing that she had been judged hardly, and it was some time before she could be at all induced to acknowledge that Mr. Clifford had not actually passed the sentence of exclusion. This fact was, however, at last admitted ; and Ruth having succeeded so far, began to urge her seriously to make up her mind to do all that was required, in order that the only real obstacle in her way might be removed. Alice did not know how or why it was—Ruth was very earnest apparently, and spoke much more fluently than Madeline, and, moreover, she gave her direct advice which Madeline never ventured upon to any one ; but still what she said did not this morning make the same impression. She felt all the time as if Ruth was making an effort. A little weariness stole over her, and she yawned once or twice, which caused Ruth to sigh and look vexed. Alice

begged her pardon, and said she really meant to attend to her notions, she knew they were extremely good ; but she was tired ; it had been very hot at the school, it was no wonder that Lady Catharine was forced to go home. Madeline passed the window just then and nodded and smiled at Alice, and begged her to wait five minutes—as there was plenty of time—and then she would come and wish her good-bye. So Alice sat down, and nothing was said either by her or Ruth for some minutes. Alice broke the silence by saying,

“I suppose, Ruth, I had better tell you what I came here for. It cannot make much difference in your opinion of me.”

Ruth was somewhat startled by this preamble.

“I don’t know how it is,” continued Alice ; “I think I get into a deeper mess every day. I wish Justine Le Vergnier had been at Nova Scotia before she thought of coming here.”

“But what is the matter now ?” asked Ruth.

“Only stupidity ; I never meant to do any harm. But Mrs. De Lacy called yesterday, as you know, and she mentioned to Lady Catharine that Florence had a French friend with her. This morning Lady Catharine asked me if it could be Justine ; and then I found out that Mrs. Carter had written about her, and said something against Florence too.”

“But what answer did you make to the question ?” enquired Ruth.

“I was silent, and she took it for granted that it was not the same person.”

Ruth looked pained and thoughtful.

“It was deceiving, I know,” said Alice ; “but what could I do ? However, I have been miserable enough since in all conscience, and I could not be happy without confessing to you.”

Ruth did not make any comment immediately ;

but began to wind a skein of silk which she had taken from her work-box.

"It is a most provoking business," observed Alice.

"Yes, a sad one," was Ruth's grave reply.

"You think I have done wrong," said Alice; "and so I have, I know: but I really am as vexed about it as you can be. There is one comfort, however; we need not have anything more to do with Florence and her plans. This notion of Madeline's will help us out of our difficulty; for we may all stay away from the pic-nic together."

Just then Ruth's silk became so entangled that she seemed unable to give her attention to what Alice was saying.

"I am sure I don't want to go to the pic-nic," continued Alice; "and, besides, it may be better not. It would certainly turn my head, if it would Madeline's; and if I am to try to be good, as you say, I had better keep out of temptation; and that will be a good excuse for us all."

Ruth laid down her silk-winder, and going to her desk took from it Justine's note, which she put into Alice's hand. Alice read it carefully, and when she had finished, remarked,

"That makes some difference. Justine evidently wishes to see you."

"Yes, to tell me her history and ask my advice."

"Then let me stay at home and you go," said Alice.

"No, no—impossible. What would papa and mamma think of me? The only excuse for my doing differently from Madeline is because of you."

"I don't know that Justine is worth taking so much trouble about," said Alice.

"But it is not Justine only, there is Florence to be thought of. We really must try and persuade her to be open with her aunt. It will never do to let her go on as she is doing now; and it would be dreadful

for Justine to be governess to Agnes if she is not a fit person. You see, if Florence will not listen to letters, we must manage to see her."

"I wish Madeline did not think it right to remain at home," observed Alice.

"But you must remember that she knows nothing of our reasons. Her example cannot be binding upon us. I am glad she stays away. We must have let her into the secret if she had gone, and though I know she would have attended to my wishes and been silent, it is just as well that she should be kept out of the affair."

Alice again said she wished they could let the matter rest; she had had quite enough of it, and the further they went on the more difficult it seemed to be to know what to do. To all which Ruth assented in words, whilst still persisting in taking her own view of duty. Not that it was easy to settle what was to be done; Lady Catharine's suspicions made it certainly dangerous for Justine to meet her. Alice said that Lady Catharine had such a sharp eye, she would be sure to notice everything that went on, and if they were the least off their guard they might do mischief; and first one plan was proposed and then another: Ruth seeing all the difficulties, and again and again repeating that it was very annoying, and quite a weight upon her mind to be obliged to manage such a business, and Alice still sighing over her past deception and wishing to be free, yet yielding to Ruth's arguments because she was unable to combat them, and always believed that what Ruth said was right—must be so.

They parted at last dissatisfied and unsettled. Ruth was to think and decide, and let Alice know her determination the next day. True to her principles of doing good, Ruth's farewell to Alice was accompanied by an entreaty that she would think of what had been said about the Confirmation.

CHAPTER XXIV.

RUTH's influence was in general all-powerful with Alice; Madeline was scarcely thought of. Now the two sisters differed, and, strange though it may appear, Madeline's opinion had the greatest weight. There is a power in simple devotedness to the service of God which always makes itself felt. It outbalances all reasoning—all which is termed philosophy. A few words from a thoroughly sincere religious person will have more effect in the end than torrents of eloquence from one who is, even in a slight degree, double-minded. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." Who does not appreciate the charm of a single-minded character? Madeline Clifford was inferior to her sister in many ways. She was not so clever; she had not the same powers of conversation; she was not so soft and engaging in manner. Ordinary acquaintances called her less interesting; but the feeling which she inspired was that of confidence and rest. She had no selfish motives: even if she decided a case according to what would appear her own advantage, no one could distrust her. It was impossible not to see that she had but one aim—the right. To Alice such a character was in a degree incomprehensible, and hitherto she had looked upon it as simply child-like; but the last conversation had altered her views. One who could steadily begin a course of religion, and carry it on amidst the temptations and difficulties of a school-life, and still continue it, month after month and year after year, could be no child; at

least in the sense in which Alice used the word. There was a sense indeed in which Madeline was a child ; in which it was probable, and much to be hoped, that she would continue a child even to her old age ; for hers was the disposition of heart to which we may believe our Lord alluded when He said, "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Alice went back to dine at the Manor with a more hearty resolution to do her duty than she had entertained for many days. She even began to consider in detail what Madeline had said, and think whether it might not be possible to adopt her plan of setting aside some time in the middle of the day for private prayer. That seemed a practical duty, which she could begin at once. Perhaps, if she could, it might help her forwards ; at any rate it was a beginning, and perhaps also—and Alice's heart bounded with a sudden and unusual feeling of happiness when the thought crossed her—perhaps, as Madeline had said, God would be pleased with her if she were to do so. Pleased with her ! Poor Alice could scarcely realize the idea of a fellow-creature being pleased with her, much less the Almighty and All Holy One. Yet the feeling came, though but for a moment. It passed across the wearying prospect of her daily duties as the sunlight flashes upon a gloomy landscape, and, when it was gone, the remembrance of the brightness which it had caused still lingered in her mind. It was the first faint glimpse of that unearthly, unwearied spirit of love, which converts the heaviest load of duty into a burden scarcely to be felt, and the saddest trials of this mortal pilgrimage into the "light affliction that endureth but for a moment." If left to herself, Alice would undoubtedly have followed Madeline's example. The hope which Ruth held out of Mr. Clifford's consenting to her confirmation, was a

great stimulus to exertion ; but if she had this in view, she could not shut her eyes to the fact that Madeline's decision regarding the pic-nic would be the safe one for herself. It did not require much self-denial to acknowledge and act upon this conclusion. Alice was out of spirits, and tired of having mysteries with Florence and Justine, and while Madeline's conversation was fresh in her mind, she cared little for their society. But the next day brought a different determination ; for the next day brought Ruth to the Manor, more bent than ever upon going, more plausible in her reasons for believing it her own duty, and more eager to convince Alice that it would be impossible for her to go alone, because it would look so strange.

All difficulties as to Lady Catharine were to be obviated by giving Florence and Justine warning beforehand : Justine would then stay away from the pic-nic, and they might hear her history from Florence, and use their utmost efforts to put things straight. Alice's volatile temper was at length worked upon to believe this to be as Ruth said, acting for the best ; doing what would be kind to Justine and useful to Florence. But Ruth was rather startled at perceiving how Alice's whole train of thought altered when the decision was finally made. Having the pic-nic in her mind, she soon threw aside the Confirmation. Ruth mentioned it, and renewed her advice, and especially warned her about being respectful and attentive to Lady Catharine ; that was a point, she said, upon which her papa would certainly be particular.

But Alice's gay "Oh, yes ; trust me ; I mean to be a piece of perfection," was very different from her thoughtfulness the day before.

"What a pity it is Alice is so changeable!" was Ruth's reflection as she left the Manor.

That of Alice, as she went down stairs to luncheon,

was, "Well! I think I am glad after all that we are going; I dare say we shall enjoy ourselves, but it will not be worth while to trouble myself with new plans till afterwards."

In one respect peculiarly Lady Catharine and Alice were entirely unlike. Lady Catharine was never changeable. What she was one day that she was on the next, unless outward circumstances had occurred to cause a reasonable alteration. She had been grave and unhappy about Alice on the previous day; she was so still. And when Lady Catharine was unhappy she was generally stern.

This is not an uncommon case, and it is one which requires a good deal of consideration in persons who are living together. It is the same when people are ill; some are melancholy, some are cross, some are quiet and moody; and it is very difficult to make allowance for them, as we should wish to have allowance made for ourselves. As for Lady Catharine, Alice thought but little about her; though she looked really very unwell. Her close widow's cap always gave a certain air of suffering to her countenance, but now she had lost her colour and scarcely ate anything. It did just cross Alice's mind that perhaps Lady Catharine was anxious about her, but the supposition seemed rather absurd. Alice was not then anxious about herself, and why should Lady Catharine be?

Lady Catharine finished her scanty meal, and waited patiently whilst Alice regaled herself with whatever she fancied. Alice was apparently hungry, or at any rate she was not inclined to be self-denying, and some little time passed in silence, during which Lady Catharine sat with her hands folded, seemingly too much occupied with her own thoughts to be willing to interrupt her companion. Yet her eyes were raised from time to time, and once they met Alice's, and then the expression was so earnest and enquiring, that Alice

felt uncomfortable, and finished her piece of cake as quickly as she could, in the hope of escaping from the scrutinizing gaze, which she felt even when she did not see it. But it was in vain to hope to escape from Lady Catharine whenever anything was to be said; and when Alice poured out the concluding glass of water, and then looked up with the unspoken request in her eye, "May I go?" Lady Catharine answered it by saying, "Alice, I should like to have a few minutes' conversation with you."

Alice's heart sank; she made no answer, but leant back in her chair and twisted her chain.

"After what passed yesterday," continued Lady Catharine, "it will not surprise you to be told that the subject upon which I wish to speak is your confirmation."

Alice only bent her eyes more stedfastly upon the floor.

"You may give up the idea at once," pursued Lady Catharine; "but I cannot. It is a very anxious time for me, Alice, and a most important one for you. No one can tell the consequences of delay. Another year, and you may not be living; I may not be living. I have spoken again to Mr. Clifford. He feels with me. He is most unwilling to interpose any obstacle. He would rejoice to know that you were prepared. Mrs. Clifford also is interested about you; I have seen them both this morning. All your friends care for you, Alice, but you will not care for yourself."

The day before, Alice might have been touched by this appeal; now she wished herself out of the room.

"It is strange," continued Lady Catharine, her tone growing more severe as she proceeded, "that the example of others should have so little influence with you. Mrs. Clifford alluded to-day to her own children. Ruth, we know, is a very charming girl; steady,

high-principled, with sense and resolution far beyond her years ; but even Madeline, whom we always considered childish and thoughtless, has in the present instance given signs of deep seriousness. Mrs. Clifford tells me that it is her wish to refrain from joining the pic-nic to St. Cuthbert's next week, because she fears it may disturb and occupy her mind more than is desirable at such a time. Alice ! what pleasure it would have given me to know that you had any such care for your best interests !”

An excuse rose to Alice's lips. She knew that even that very morning her wish had been to follow Madeline's example.

“The world, I see,” continued Lady Catharine, regarding her attentively, “has too much power over you, to enable you to consent to any such sacrifice. You will, perhaps, say that Ruth does not see the necessity of it, and therefore why should you ? But Ruth and yourself cannot be put upon a par. No doubt there are very good reasons for her accepting the invitation ; in fact, it may not be proper that all the party should refuse. I am not saying that I consider it necessary for any of you to do so ; I only mention the case as an instance of Madeline's earnestness. If you were in earnest, Alice, there would be many ways of shewing it even if you did go with Ruth.”

“I do not care about the pic-nic,” said Alice, in a proud tone. “Ruth knows that I do not. I am perfectly willing to stay at home.”

“Alice,” replied Lady Catharine, “you are taking up this matter perversely. Going to the pic-nic, or not going, will not render you fit or unfit for confirmation. It is the principle upon which you act that is really of importance. You may, like Ruth, choose from good and right motives to go ; or you may, like Madeline, choose from good and right motives to stay at home ; in either case I should be satisfied. In your present

mood, on the contrary, I must be dissatisfied. If you were to shut yourself up in your room for the next week, it would not make a difference; it is the heart, Alice, which is at fault." Alice was still piqued by a sense of injustice at Lady Catharine's words; she forgot that Lady Catharine could not know what had passed in her thoughts.

"When the idea of delaying your confirmation was first proposed," continued Lady Catharine, "I hoped that the very idea would so have distressed you as to arouse a spirit of energy. But I am disappointed, grievously disappointed; you appear utterly indifferent. God grant you may not really be so."

A tear glistened in Alice's eye, but she strove to appear indifferent. Lady Catharine gazed upon her sadly, and a sigh rose from the very depths of her heart. "Alice," she said, more solemnly, "indecision cannot continue. If your conduct does not determine the question one way it will the other; and remember, that in these smaller trials of life, we are rehearsing the great trial of our whole existence on earth. Every time that we are called upon to make choice between good and evil, we are throwing a weight into the balance which shall decide our happiness for eternity."

Then the tear which had gathered in Alice's eye rolled slowly down her cheek; but she turned away, and Lady Catharine did not perceive it.

When Alice, after this conversation, went to her room, a note from Ruth was lying on her table. It was to this effect, that she had found on her return home that Mrs. De Lacy had written to Mrs. Clifford, saying that the arrangements for the picnic were quite completed, and she hoped nothing would happen to interfere with the pleasure of the party. They were to meet at Sheldon, and from thence proceed to St. Cuthbert's,—a very large party, much

larger than was at first proposed. Lady Catharine was to bring the Laneton party to Sheldon, and afterwards they might settle as to the young people going together, which would of course be more agreeable to them. They were to dine under the trees in one of the court-yards of the castle, if the weather should be fine; but as there was an empty room at the porter's lodge, it would not much interfere with their comfort even if there should be a shower of rain. Mrs. De Lacy hinted the possibility of returning to Sheldon, and finishing the evening there; upon which Ruth's observation was, "I think this may suit us. In a line to me, Florence says she has settled to go alone; why, I do not know." Alice read the note twice, with much interest. It was still open before her when she sat down, trying to recall the feelings which Lady Catharine's words had awakened. The choice between good and evil at that moment lay before her. The party of pleasure was not the unimportant matter which Lady Catharine imagined. Alice knew,—she did not even attempt to shut her eyes to the knowledge,—that it would be a temptation, and that if she could avoid it, a victory over herself would be obtained, and the first step on the right road taken.

When Alice entered her own chamber the resolution was all but made. She read Ruth's note and wavered. Indecision! still indecision! Alice was miserable again. But Ruth was going herself—Ruth wished her to go—Ruth was so good she could not lead any one wrong.

And was Ruth, then, become Alice's tempter? She, whose one sole object was to do good. Was it possible?

CHAPTER XXV.

It was a glorious day for the pic-nic at St. Cuthbert's, bright, and almost cloudless, with a soft cooling breeze, and no prospect of a change of weather. Madeline rose early, and a feeling of regret stole over her as she threw open the lattice and fastened it back. The fresh air blew deliciously into the room, bearing the scent of the roses, and jasmine, and clematis, which covered the walls of the house. She sat down by the open window, to gather a rosebud which was just lifting itself to a level with her hand, and remained thinking for many minutes. Ruth came to her, and kneeling down by her side, said :

"Maddy, I wish you were going."

Madeline was startled by the expression of her own wishes ; it recalled her to herself. "No," she said, "don't wish it. I am much better away."

"But it would add very much to my pleasure if you were going," observed Ruth. "I never like things when you are away, there seems no one to enjoy them with me. Sisters are different from everything else."

"Yes, sisters are different," said Madeline, gently putting back Ruth's hair, and gazing upon her with a look of affection that could not be spoken. "A sister is one's self; something so precious; it is a weight upon my mind very often that I cannot say it out more. Ruth! I do love you so very dearly." Madeline's lip quivered, and when Ruth kissed her she smiled and said, "She felt so silly, almost as if she could cry."

"About the pic-nic, or because you are fond of me?" enquired Ruth, in a tone which, whatever the words might have appeared, shewed no lightness of feeling.

"Because I am fond of you, I think. I don't know why it is, but beautiful days always make me think more of you, Ruth. We have spent a great many together, very happy ones."

"And it seems hard that we cannot spend this one," observed Ruth.

"Yes, it did seem hard just for a moment; but the worst is gone now. One reason why I am sorry is because we have never had any pleasure apart before."

"No, never since we were children," replied Ruth.

"And it would not have signified in the same way then," continued Madeline. "We did not know then why we cared for each other; but it grows upon one now,—the love, the certainty that we are all in all to each other, that nothing can come between us. Sometimes in the bright summer days, when you are with me, it comes over me like a new feeling."

Ruth was resting her head upon Madeline's shoulder, and her arm was clasped around her waist. The strong resemblance of childhood was still remarkable between them. Their fair hair mingled in curls which could not be distinguished in colour, and the eyes of each bore the same bright hue. Madeline's smile was subdued now, and the expression of her mouth might have been taken for that of Ruth; and as Ruth raised her eyes to her sister, half in thankfulness for her love, and half in eagerness to show how fully it was returned, the warmth and simplicity of her expression might have been Madeline's in her happiest mood. We are all strangely formed in one mould, yet the infinite difference that lies beneath

the outward resemblance! God only can understand it!

"Yes, you will love me always," was Ruth's reply, spoken in a low earnest voice; "but Madeline," she added, "I wish we could always think alike."

"I do not see where we differ to-day," replied Madeline. "I should do like you if I were strong-minded."

"Strong-minded," repeated Ruth, musingly.

"Yes, that is the one thing especially in which I feel you are my superior."

Ruth said hurriedly, "Madeline, I am not your superior."

Madeline only smiled, and answered, "That it was not the time to argue the question. Dress first, Ruth, dear," she said playfully, "and we will talk about it afterwards."

Yet Ruth still lingered at the window, looking intently upon the view of the gardens and the village, and the distant sea. "Madeline, I am not your superior," she said again, after a few seconds, "and it is not because I am good that I am going to the picnic."

Madeline went up to her, and kissing her, answered, "You shall be as wicked as you like if you will only dress. We are both dreadfully late."

"But," said Ruth, taking no notice of the warning, "I wish you would understand me; and I wish I could understand you exactly; what the real reason is, I mean, for your not going."

Madeline laughed. "Why Ruth," she said, "you do not suspect me of two reasons, do you?"

"No, not two; but I do not think you have one clear one."

"I will tell you what my reason is," said Madeline. "Do you remember last year when we were staying with grandmamma and aunt Mordaunt, our

drinking tea at old Mr. Falconer's, and some of the people playing whist?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Then you must remember too that lady who would be particular about following rules, and kept on saying, 'When in doubt, win the trick.' I asked papa afterwards what it meant, and he said, it was a lesson for life as well as for cards; that when we were in doubt as to what was right it was better to decide upon that which would be safer at the present moment. So you see that is what I am doing. It might do me harm to go to the pic-nic; therefore, as there is a doubt, it seems better to stay at home and win the trick."

Ruth was ready with an objection that this would not hold good, because there must be a doubt about all society, whether it was desirable.

But Madeline's quick reply was drawn from a remark of her papa's, "That of course, as a general rule, people were not made to live like hermits, and therefore they must meet in society, and it would be wrong to stay away. But each one must decide for himself, according to his own conscience, as to what society, and how much was good. The pic-nic she thought would not be good for her at that particular time, which was the reason she refrained from it.

Lady Catharine's carriage turned into the Parsonage lane punctually as the clock struck nine. Madeline was the first to hear the rumble of the wheels, and to hasten Ruth, that Lady Catharine might not be kept an instant waiting. "Here are your gloves and your parasol, Ruth; and don't forget your shawl. It will be cold perhaps coming home; and your cloak too, I think you had better have. Stay, the string is off, just take mine instead. How glad I am it is a nice day." There was no sadness in Madeline's face then; her step was as light and free, and her voice as

cheerful, as if she had been anticipating the greatest amusement, instead of a long and almost solitary day.

The head of the barouche was drawn over, though it was a very warm morning, and no one saw at first that the carriage only contained one person.

"Two, there must be, certainly," said Madeline, in precisely that tone which expresses decided doubt. "Ruth, just come here." Ruth went to her.

"No, Madeline; there is only one. Alice it is. Lady Catharine is not there. How very strange!"

"She must be ready," said Madeline, laughing. "I will venture to say that Lady Catharine was never known to be late from the time she could walk to the present hour."

"The house must be burnt down, or that staid Marsham must be ill," continued Ruth, "or Lady Catharine must have slept ten minutes beyond her time; no common cause could induce her to break an engagement."

Both ran to the door to receive Alice, and enquire what was the matter.

Alice looked pleased rather than not, as she said that it was nothing very particular, only one of the housemaids had been taken ill, and Lady Catharine did not like to leave home, so she had sent her alone and begged that Mrs. Clifford would take charge of her. "She was very good-natured about it, I must say," continued Alice, "I never saw her so fussed before; first thinking of one thing, then another. Once she said we should go and return quite early; but I think I must have looked disappointed, for she changed her mind directly, and said, 'No, that would not do;' and then she thought that perhaps Maria would be better before we set off; but at last she settled that I should go without her, though I am sure she did not half fancy it."

"And did you not offer to stay at home?" enquired Madeline, in a tone of some surprise.

"No, it never entered my head. Would it have been right, do you think?"

"It would have helped Lady Catharine out of a difficulty," replied Madeline.

"Well! perhaps it might, but I never once thought of it; and besides, it would not have done, would it Ruth?" she added, with a meaning glance, which made Ruth turn away in displeasure. "I must say one thing to you," continued Alice, drawing Ruth aside, "I had a long sermon about young ladies' friendships, and specially about Florence Trevelyan. I really believe that if she thought I cared an iota for Florence, beyond liking to see her because we were at school together, she would have kept me from the picnic. She seems to have some especial prejudice against her; and says she cannot help being glad that the whole party are going to France. We are safe, however, in one way; she has not a notion that Justine is really Justine, for she said again that of course I should have known if she had been my old acquaintance."

"I wonder after all this that you were allowed to come with us," said Ruth, whose countenance had become more and more overcast as Alice went on.

"The long engagement, and your mamma's going with us were the great things in my favour," replied Alice. "Lady Catharine has such trust in your mamma."

"I begin to be half sorry we have troubled ourselves at all about Justine or Florence either," said Ruth. "It might have been better to let them take their own way."

Alice only laughed, and declared, "She did not care for anything now. She intended to enjoy herself thoroughly, and put care aside."

“Care and the Confirmation,” thought Ruth; for the quiet way in which Alice repeated what Lady Catharine had said, and the indifference with which she spoke of her own particular deception, were convincing proofs that her mind was not in a fit state for a religious ordinance.

Madeline gazed after the carriage as it drove away with a passing wish to be in it; but it was so soon checked, that when her father stopped her as she was going up stairs, and asked if she repented her choice, she was able to answer, heartily and sincerely, “No indeed, but I hope they will have a happy day.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

FLORENCE TREVELYAN met Ruth with the information—accompanied by a smile which she could not altogether restrain—that Justine had a bad headache and was to keep her room for the day. When she found, however, that Lady Catharine was remaining at the Manor, her tone of amusement changed into that of annoyance.

“How extremely provoking!” she exclaimed, “to have given up our pleasure for nothing! and, besides, I rather looked forward to seeing Juno scrambling over the broken walls.”

A look of great disgust crossed Ruth’s face.

“It is safer in one way though,” said Alice, who had joined them, and who perceived that Ruth was not inclined to reply. “Mrs. Clifford might have made remarks as well as Lady Catharine.”

“We were not much afraid of that, as long as she has no suspicions,” replied Florence; “for Mrs. Clifford never saw Justine, and my aunt—who has a knack of miscalling foreign names—always addresses her as Mademoiselle Veray, and one name being as good as another, we have never taken the trouble to enlighten her.”

“Florence, Florence!” exclaimed Ruth, “this will never do. You really grow worse and worse.”

“Ah, well! we will have a little talk together by-and-by. Don’t trouble yourself, Ruth; you will be quite satisfied,” and Florence moved away to speak to some other friends.

Ruth watched her as she went from one to the


other, smiling and talking, and bending gracefully, and with perfect self-possession, whilst her aunt introduced her to several persons whom she had not known before ; and could scarcely believe it possible that this was the same dull, silly girl to whom she had felt herself so superior at school, and who even now seemed to look to her for advice. Nothing is so flattering to our self-conceit as deference shown by those who either in rank, age, or position are naturally above us ; and Ruth felt raised in her own opinion, when she saw that she was respected by one who apparently knew so much more of the world than she did. Florence herself appeared in a new light ; and the ease of manner which she showed struck Ruth as something wonderful and enviable. The party was now complete, and Mrs. De Lacy eager to set off. Mrs. Clifford, Ruth, and Alice were called away to settle in what carriage and with what friends they would best like to proceed to St. Cuthbert's. Florence tried very hard to manage for Ruth and Alice to go alone with her in a little pony chaise of Mrs. De Lacy's ? but Mrs. Clifford was anxious about Alice, as Lady Catharine was not there to give her consent, and very unwillingly was obliged to insist upon her remaining with her. Alice was extremely disappointed ; but consoled herself by the thought that it would be almost as pleasant to have Ruth and Mrs. Clifford to herself as to be with Florence. Here again, however, she found an obstacle to her wishes. Mrs. Clifford did not object to Ruth's going with Florence, provided there was a servant behind ; and when the choice was given to Ruth between the barouche and the pony chaise, true to her principle of doing good, she decided that it would be better to remain with Florence, and have an opportunity of conversing with her, than to shut herself up with Alice whom she might see

every day. When the whole party at length drove off, poor Alice was almost the only person dissatisfied with the arrangement made for her.

St. Cuthbert's Castle stood near the sea shore, upon a flat space of raised ground, the sides of which were covered with trees and underwood; the ruins spread over a considerable extent, and the outer walls could be traced without difficulty; but the former habitable part of the building was now converted into a homely dwelling, inhabited by the family of a poor man to whose charge the castle was committed, and only one room remained, with its low rafters, and deep windows encircled by ivy, and half hidden by shrubs and elder bushes, to show the style of the apartments in which our ancestors once lived.

A deep ravine lay between the castle and the opposite hill, on the summit of which was placed a watch-tower, commanding an extensive view over the sea, and reaching to a faint line of the coast many miles distant. It was more as a picturesque ruin, and beautiful in its situation, that St. Cuthbert's was celebrated, than from possessing any remarkable historical associations. The original building, like that of many other castles of the kind, was of Saxon date; but tradition stated that the Britons had fortified the same spot even before them.

A pic-nic, however, does not afford the very best opportunity for carrying on study of any kind. Mrs. De Lacy's party in general cared little for Britons or Saxons. The greater part sought for amusement in clambering over dangerous places; a few had set their hearts upon obtaining a good position for a sketch, and of the remainder some wandered about in alarm, watching the young people, who seemed upon the point of breaking their necks as they scrambled over the walls, and some sat down upon



the grass and talked over old times with friends whom they had not lately met, whilst one or two, amongst whom Mrs. De Lacy was conspicuous, hurried from spot to spot, to seek the best situation for preparing the dinner, a main object of all English meetings whether of business or of pleasure.

Mrs. Clifford was unwilling to be any restraint upon Alice, and as soon as they arrived at the castle, proposed that she should wait for Ruth and Florence, who were some little way behind them, and then join them and go over the ruins together. Alice assented, though without appearing particularly to care what she did. She was, in fact, annoyed at having been left by Ruth; and not all Mrs. Clifford's endeavours to amuse her on the road had sufficed to restore her to good humour. Ruth and Florence drove up in high spirits, all serious conversation having been diverted by the necessity of attending to a frisky pony. Ruth had made her first essay in driving, and was very desirous of exhibiting her skill as they entered the court yard. She called to Alice to observe how well she could manage, but Alice only looked up and said,

"Yes," and made no further remark.

"Are you ready, my dear?" said Mrs. Clifford, as Alice lingered, examining the gateway, before entering the castle. "We are the last of all."

Alice hurried on, and Mrs. Clifford, reading what was passing in her mind, followed, willing, if possible, to put her in good spirits again.

"We must not keep quite to ourselves," she said, "or we shall miss hearing all there is to be told. The old guide will never forgive us if we make him repeat his story twice."

"Oh! but, mamma," exclaimed Ruth, "let us get rid of the old guide. I have brought the book that papa gave me the other day, telling all about

the castle. It will be much better to go over it by ourselves, and find out all the parts. Come, Florence."

Agnes De Lacy at that moment ran up to them. She had been sent by her mamma to look for them. Mrs. De Lacy wanted Florence to give her opinion about the proper place for the dinner. Florence hurried away, but returned almost immediately, begging Ruth to accompany her. This marked preference irritated Alice still more; it seemed as if Ruth had quite taken her place; but Mrs. Clifford objected to Ruth's going alone, and they went on together; Florence and Ruth still in front. Mrs. De Lacy had fixed upon a shady spot under some trees, which grew in what had once been the tilt-yard of the castle. It was a large free space, sheltered and private, and here the servants were busy placing as many tables and chairs as could be provided from the porter's lodge, whilst hampers and baskets, veal pies and hams, tarts and sandwiches, cakes, biscuits, soda water and champagne bottles, reposed side by side upon the grass. Mrs. De Lacy was one of those persons who, when roused from indolence, can only be happy in extreme activity. She detained Florence a long time consulting her upon points which would have been much better settled by the servants; and Florence, not liking to be alone in her annoyance, kept Ruth by her side, whilst Mrs. Clifford and Alice sat down upon a bench, expecting every minute to be at liberty. Several parties strayed into the tilt-yard; but finding how it was to be occupied, went away, and as their voices were heard in merriment, sometimes quite near and sometimes in the distance, whilst they explored the castle, Alice grew more and more provoked at being obliged to waste so much time. Mrs. Clifford was just thinking of calling Ruth and going over the ruins with

them alone, when a gentleman and two ladies appeared in the court, and instead of retiring, made their way to Mrs. De Lacy. The gentleman apologised for intruding, but begged to leave his niece under her care, whilst he went with his daughter to see the castle. The young lady was then taken to a seat near that occupied by Mrs. Clifford and Alice, and her uncle and cousin went away. She was a pleasing-looking girl, apparently much out of health. Alice was struck by her features; they recalled a face she had seen before, and she tried to remember whose it was. She went up to Ruth, who had wandered away with Florence to a little distance.

"Do look, Ruth," she said, "who can that be? Just watch her; she is so precisely like some one I know."

Ruth had not noticed her particularly, but now she drew nearer.

"Mary Vernon!" she said; "how very odd!—exactly her face it is; only the hair is lighter. Who is she, Florence?"

"I don't know," said Florence, quickly; "my aunt has asked a great many whom I have never seen. I hope she has nothing to do with Mary Vernon."

"Don't say that, Florence," exclaimed Ruth, eagerly. "Mary Vernon is delightful; but you never would acknowledge it."

"I don't care for her," said Florence, "one way or the other; but I am glad she is in Ireland, and I do not wish her or any of her friends to trouble themselves with our concerns just now."

"Why? what? how could they trouble themselves?" inquired Ruth.

"Oh! I don't know. I think they are interfering people," replied Florence, with an air of indifference; but she immediately turned the conversation.

Ruth regarded the young lady more attentively, and again declared the likeness to Mary Vernon so striking, that she could not rest without knowing who she was. Florence, however, called her attention to another subject immediately, and although Ruth made several attempts to go, she was detained for some little time. Mrs. De Lacy, in the mean time, had introduced the stranger to Mrs. Clifford as a Miss Merton, a niece of Colonel Merton, the gentleman who had just left them, and who had a house in the neighbourhood of Sheldon. After this introduction, conversation went on easily; and when Alice, having finished her few words with Ruth, went back to the bench, she found Mrs. Clifford and their new acquaintance on very agreeable terms. Alice listened to what was said with much interest, endeavouring to find a clue to the striking likeness; and one subject leading to another, it was not long before the desired point was reached. London was spoken of; London air; residences in London; schools amongst them; then Mrs. Carter's name was mentioned, and the mystery was immediately solved, by Miss Merton's exclamation: "Oh! were you at Mrs. Carter's? I had a first cousin there two or three years ago. Mary Vernon—did you know her?" Alice laughed at this easy explanation of the circumstance which had perplexed her, and giving but a hasty answer to the question, hastened away to tell Ruth of the discovery. Florence was just then proposing to Ruth that they should carry off Alice on a scrambling expedition to the top of the gateway, and leave Mrs. De Lacy and Mrs. Clifford to take care of the stranger, who seemed, she said, to have neither strength nor spirits for such an undertaking.

"Never mind Mary Vernon and Miss Merton, Alice," she exclaimed, her countenance showing anything but satisfaction, at the information which

Alice gave with so much pleasure. "They are very good people, I dare say; but Mary Vernon is in Ireland, and Miss Merton is fixed to that bench for the rest of the day. They are neither of them any good on a pic-nic party. I can't see indeed why invalids should come to such things."

"Come, Ruth, you must be introduced to her," said Alice in her turn, unheeding Florence's observation.

"Yes, of course, I will come directly. I think I should like to stay and talk to her. Can't we wait, Florence, till after dinner, for the gateway?"

"No, no, indeed, we must not; we shall have the watch-tower for after dinner; and your sketch, Ruth, which you told me you had set your heart upon."

"Yes, I forgot, I was to take it for Madeline; but still I must just ask about Mary. Do wait for me—only five minutes."

"No, really, Ruth, we must not wait; if we want to see the gateway, we must go at once. I dare say Miss Merton is quite happy without knowing you."

"No, I assure you she is not," observed Alice; "I heard her mention Ruth's name just as I came away. Of course, Mary Vernon has talked to her about Ruth."

Florence looked more discomposed than Alice had often before seen her; but finding that Ruth was bent upon the introduction, she followed close behind, begging her not to delay. Ruth had many questions to ask and much to hear, being delighted to meet with some one who had lately seen Mary Vernon, and could tell every particular about her; but Florence seemed determined to give her no rest. Miss Merton happening to mention that she hoped to remain in the neighbourhood some time, Florence instantly made this a pretext for hurrying Ruth away, observing that, "as there would be many future opportunities,

no doubt, for conversation, but none, probably, for seeing St. Cuthbert's, it would be better to defer what was to be said for the present.

Alice had by this time partially recovered her good humour; not, however, from any effort of principle, but merely because her attention was drawn off from herself. When Florence begged her to accompany them, she made no objection, though a little before she had formed the perverse resolution of leaving Ruth and Florence to themselves for the rest of the day. Mrs. Clifford could not allow Miss Merton to remain alone, as Mrs. De Lacy was gone from the tilt-yard; and after promising to return in time for dinner, and to keep to the regular steps which led to the top of the gateway, Florence, Ruth, and Alice went away together, evidently much to the satisfaction of the former. Alice could not help saying to Ruth as they lingered in a narrow path a little behind Florence:—

"I thought, Ruth, you had given me up, and taken to a new friend."

Ruth quite laughed at the idea.

"How foolish, Alice!" she replied; "you forget the reason of my coming here."

"To see Florence and talk to her gravely; but have you done it?"

"Not yet; there has not been time enough."

"When you were driving together there was, surely; and just now, when you were walking up and down the court, you were talking very fast."

"There are proper seasons," replied Ruth; "one cannot introduce subjects abruptly; but I mean to say something by and by. All this is leading to it; we are becoming better acquainted, and Florence will be more inclined to listen to me when she understands me thoroughly. I assure you it is not time thrown away if one has any hope of influencing her rightly."

“Well! you know best,” was Alice’s reply; “but I am glad to have a reason for things. And you really do not like Florence better than me?”

“Oh no! impossible!” exclaimed Ruth, in a tone so loud, that it made Florence turn round and enquire what was impossible? But Ruth evaded the answer, and changed the conversation, and it was apparently forgotten, though Alice became more cheerful after it.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A GREAT bell rang—the bell at the gateway : it was the signal for dinner. Parties came pouring into the tilt-yard from every quarter. Florence, Ruth, and Alice made their appearance when the tables were half filled. Mrs. Clifford went to meet them.

“You are late, my dears, but I have kept places for you. Colonel Merton was kind enough to give an order to his servant.”

Florence slightly coloured, and pointing to an empty place at her aunt’s table, said they could go there.

“Thank you ; but we need not crowd Mrs. De Lacy. Come Alice, my love ;” and Mrs. Clifford, feeling herself especially bound to take charge of Alice, walked forward with her.

The countenance of Florence betrayed extreme annoyance ; but her face was averted from Ruth, and they both hurried on.

“Now, then,” said Colonel Merton, as they came up, “there are two seats on each side reserved especially.”

Florence still went on at the risk of crowding Mrs. Clifford.

“Mrs. Clifford, this place is for you,” said Colonel Merton. He pointed to the seat next to himself.

Miss Merton took her position next to Alice, by her side. Florence could not prevent it ; she went round to a chair opposite, and sank into it with a face gloomy as a thunder-cloud.

“And that young lady is the daughter of Mr.

Trevelyan of Cromer Court, is she?" enquired Miss Merton of Alice, as she looked at Florence after a silence of some length.

"Yes; there are two sisters and several brothers. You must have heard Mary Vernon speak of her."

"Was she at Mrs. Carter's? I forgot Mary's mentioning that. What I have known about her has been since they were at school."

"Indeed!" repeated Alice. "I fancied you were strangers."

"So we are personally; but there was an unhappy affair about a French governess in which she was mixed up, and then I used to hear her name frequently. Mary and she did not take the same view of the case. It was a sad business altogether."

Alice's curiosity was in a moment completely aroused. Just then Mrs. Clifford spoke to Alice upon some indifferent subject; yet Alice was struck by her tone of voice, for it was unusually grave. Alice gave the answer; but Mrs Clifford did not seem to regard it. She was watching Florence and Ruth.

"I have told Mrs. Clifford the history," continued Miss Merton, "without mentioning Mademoiselle Le Vergnier's name, and she quite agrees with me in thinking Miss Trevelyan decidedly mistaken, to say the least."

"Is it a long history?" enquired Alice, not liking openly to say how much she wished to hear it.

"Rather, if I were to tell you all," replied Miss Merton; "but did Miss Trevelyan never mention the subject to you?"

"I have heard something about a governess," said Alice, feeling ashamed of the equivocation, and yet not thinking herself at liberty to speak more plainly.

"I should have supposed you would have known the whole affair," continued Miss Merton; "for

this French governess had something to do with Mrs. Carter. She was not exactly a pupil; but Mrs. Carter, I know, was very much interested about her, and indeed kept friends with her much longer than any one else would have done."

"But what was the story?" asked Alice.

"I can scarcely tell you in detail—dinner would be ended before I had half finished, if I were to try—but I can give it you shortly. Though I should not wish Miss Trevelyan to know we were talking about it," she added, observing that the eyes of Florence were fixed upon them.

"Oh! never mind," replied Alice, eager above all things to hear the truth of Justine's history. "No one can hear across the table, there is such a noise."

"My authority is very good," observed Miss Merton; "for this French girl, Mademoiselle Le Vergnier—you must recollect her now, surely?"

"Yes—the name—I knew her a little," replied Alice, hurriedly.

"Mademoiselle Le Vergnier was governess to some cousins of Mary Vernon's, the Darnleys. They lived not very far from us when we were in Shropshire, and they were very good people—rather strict, but still extremely respected—and I am sure they would not for the world have told a falsehood. They took this Justine Le Vergnier, upon a recommendation of some old friends, to be a governess. Mary Vernon heard of it, and not having a good opinion of her, was rather worried at the notion. She wrote, I know, to Mrs. Carter about it, and Mrs. Carter gave Mrs. Darnley a hint to be watchful as to books, and conversation, and that sort of thing; but the children were very young, and Mrs. Carter said that it would be a perfect charity if Justine could be for some time in a steady family; and she really hoped that she was much improved and likely to do well. So she

went there, and at first it was all very smooth, and Mrs. Darnley liked her extremely. At the end of six months Mr. and Mrs. Darnley were called away from home upon some very special business, and they thought as they had a good nurse, they might leave Justine with the children for about a week. She made all sorts of promises, and they went away perfectly satisfied. They came back rather suddenly, late at night. Of course Justine was to have been there to meet them; but she was not; no one knew anything about her; the children were in bed, and the servants in the kitchen; but there was no Mademoiselle Le Vergnier. About half-past eleven she came in, very much distressed and surprised of course, but she had an admirable excuse ready. A young friend, lately come to the neighbourhood, had, she said, been taken very ill, and had sent to beg her to go to her; and as there was no one in the house whose permission she could ask, she had gone, after seeing that the children were safe in bed. It seemed strange that she should have told nothing to the servants; but she gave some plausible reason—I forget what—and Mrs. Darnley began to think it was all right."

"And was it really so?" inquired Alice.

"No, indeed. I cannot tell you how the truth came out; it was only by degrees. She kept up the deception wonderfully even about the sick friend; but at last it was discovered that this going out was a constant practice, and that she was in the habit of visiting not only the sick friend but all her family, without Mrs. Darnley's knowledge. And what made it infinitely worse, these people were persons whom her father particularly objected to her knowing, or having anything to do with. You may suppose there was an end to her situation at Mrs. Darnley's, and she was sent home as fast as possible."

"It was wrong—extremely wrong," said Alice, looking very thoughtful. "Are you quite sure it is true?"

"Yes; how could I be mistaken? The Darnleys are Mary Vernon's cousins; the moment all this was known they wrote to her to tell her of it. Mary had some correspondence with Justine herself."

"But Mary never said anything to Ruth in any of her letters," observed Alice.

"No, because Mary is careful and charitable, and will never say a word against any person if she can possibly help it; and such a story as this must be the ruin of Justine with every one. I should never have heard it, but that a friend of mine had some thoughts of engaging her; then Mary told me the whole history, a great deal more than I have told you."

"And did Mary think that nothing could ever be done for Justine?" inquired Alice.

"She was extremely unhappy about her, especially after she had prevented my friend from engaging her. It seemed, she said, as if she had done Justine an injury; and I know that she gave her money through Mrs. Carter, and managed at one time to procure her some pupils for drawing and French lessons merely, where she could do no harm. But it was impossible for her to keep up the acquaintance, because she herself is quite young, and her father and aunt would highly have disapproved of it."

"But you have not said anything about Florence yet," said Alice.

"Miss Trevelyan—oh, I forgot. But do you know,"—and Miss Merton blushed—"I am not at all sure I have been doing right in talking to you in this way. I don't think Mary Vernon would have done it. I began from fancying that as you appeared such a great friend of Miss Trevelyan's, you might

have heard all the affair before, and then I was led on I don't know how. Really I believe it was very wrong."

"But you must finish now," said Alice with a little brusqueness of manner, and not at all sympathising with her companion's self-reproach. "I think you are bound to tell me what you have to say against Florence."

"Not against her, that is such a hard expression," said Miss Merton, looking very uncomfortable.

"But I should like to know what it is you have to say," persisted Alice, who perceived that the party was on the point of breaking up, and was anxious to learn all that could be told before she was separated from her new acquaintance.

"After all, you may think it more a difference of opinion than any real harm," replied Miss Merton. "I believe Miss Trevelyan had been in the habit of corresponding with Mademoiselle Le Vergnier, and when this unfortunate business was discovered, Justine wrote to give her version of it; and, although Miss Trevelyan was told the whole history, even to the most minute details, she took Justine's part, and actually persuaded her father and mother to invite her to Cromer Court."

"But if she believed Justine innocent," said Alice, "how could it be wrong?"

"How was she to be the judge?" said Miss Merton. "How could she know more of Justine's character than the Darnleys and Mrs. Carter? Mrs. Carter tried to stop the acquaintance, but Miss Trevelyan is such a favourite at home, that she was allowed to do just what she liked. The friendship went on, and goes on still, I believe, though I have not heard of it lately; and I don't know what has become of Mademoiselle Le Vergnier. I rather think

she went back to her father after staying at Cromer Court."

"Alice, my dear," said Mrs. Clifford, "where are your thoughts?"

Alice started.

"We are left nearly the last, you see," said Mrs. Clifford, smiling.

Alice rose mechanically, and stood looking about, as if not knowing what to do. Whilst listening to Miss Merton, her imagination had strayed far away from the pic-nic.

"I am afraid you will think me very unkind," whispered Miss Merton.

"Oh no, not at all; I am glad to have heard." Alice did not think of saying anything more; she was not used to society, and allowed herself to be absorbed and rendered absent by any subject which might be uppermost at the moment. Whether Miss Merton was annoyed or not was just then a question of no consequence, her whole mind being set upon telling Ruth what she had learnt.

Florence Trevelyan joined her almost immediately on their leaving the tilt-yard. Miss Merton went to her uncle, and Mrs. Clifford begged Ruth to remain with her.

The first observation which Florence made shewed what was in her thoughts. "Well, Alice, how have you been getting on? You and Miss Merton seemed to be making immense friends."

Alice made a short reply, and continued her own train of thought, which related chiefly to the conduct of Florence. Alice could not doubt that Florence was sincere in her belief of Justine's innocence, but she still could not reconcile it to herself that Florence should credit Justine's own version of her story, against such glaring facts as had now been related. Neither had

Florence been open in all she had said to Alice, when first speaking of Justine; she had mentioned Mrs. Carter in a general way, as prejudiced; as believing idle stories from hearsay; whereas, from Miss Merton's account, Mrs. Carter was fully aware of every circumstance. Florence had not said anything positively untrue, but she had contrived to mystify the whole affair. Alice felt that she could not trust her as she had done before, and she longed to ask a fuller explanation, but in honour to Miss Merton she could not repeat what had been said. All these thoughts rendered her silent, and she continually looked round for Ruth, wishing that she would come, till Florence was provoked, and declared she would join a party which was before them, and go to the watch-tower with them, for Alice was really too stupid to be a companion on a pic-nic. This remark had no effect in bringing out Alice's private thoughts, which were what Florence really desired to know. She only repeated her desire to see Ruth, and at length insisted upon sitting down to wait for her.

Florence would not leave her, notwithstanding her threat; she seemed to have an instinctive knowledge that all would go wrong with her schemes if she went away. "Here they are," she exclaimed, after they had waited nearly ten minutes, "Ruth, and Mrs. Clifford, and my aunt. How long you have kept us!" pursued Florence, addressing Ruth, as the party came up.

"Ruth," observed Alice, "you look pale; are you ill?"

"No, thank you."

If Ruth was not ill she was very nervous and hurried. Alice asked her again if anything was the matter.

"Nothing, nothing!" She put her arm within that of Florence, and walked on very fast.

Alice was more hurt than angry. This second appearance of neglect was more than she could well bear.

They now began to descend a winding path, through the low shrubs and copsewood, which covered the ravine between the castle and the watch-tower hill. The way was rough, and only one person could go abreast. Their progress was not very speedy, and Florence and Ruth were soon out of sight.

"Ruth has forgotten her sketching-book," said Mrs. Clifford; "do Alice run after her, and beg them not to go so fast, we shall never be able to keep up with them."

And Alice hastened on, thinking that she should overtake Ruth almost immediately; this, however, was not so easily done. Ruth and Florence walked quickly, and when Alice reached a spot where two ways met, she found nothing to shew her in which direction to proceed. She took the one which appeared the least overgrown, and proceeded for some little distance, though without seeing any sign of her companions. Then she thought it would be better to go back; but by this time Mrs. Clifford and the rest of the party had passed the turning, and taken the contrary path, so that Alice was left behind by all.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN the mean time Ruth had hurried Florence forward with the intention of outstripping the rest of the party, and when they reached a sufficient distance she stopped for a moment, and exclaimed, "Oh, Florence! this unhappy business with Justine, it has made me miserable. I have done so wrong!"

"How? what can have happened?" asked Florence, turning pale.

"I have deceived," exclaimed Ruth, in a tone of bitter self-reproach; "I have deceived mamma, wilfully. I have all but told a story. What will she think of me?"

"Ruth, what do you mean? what can Mrs. Clifford know?"

"I cannot tell what she has heard," replied Ruth, "but she must have some suspicions; not about me though; she would never suspect me, and that makes it much worse; and I never meant to deceive her; I would not do it for all the world. Florence, I am so very unhappy!"

"Pray be quick," exclaimed Florence, hastening on; "we shall be overtaken in a minute, and I must understand what you are talking of."

"Mamma stopped me as we left the dinner table," said Ruth. "She looked very anxious and worried, and asked me if you had not a friend staying with you. I said, 'Yes.' Then she asked me if she was not a French girl, who was going to be governess to Agnes; and I said 'Yes' too. Then she wanted to

know if I had ever seen her, and I was puzzled what to say, when Mrs. De Lacy came up to us; she had heard just the last words, and said, 'Oh! is it Mademoiselle Veray you are talking of?' Mamma turned to me, and said, 'That was not the name of the young lady whom you knew at Mrs. Carter's, was it Ruth?'

"Of course you said No," interrupted Florence.

"Yes, I did not know what else to say, but I was wretched directly I had done it; and mamma smiled, and said she was glad to hear that it was not the same person; and then Mrs. De Lacy went on talking about Justine, and remarked what a pleasing girl she was, and asked if I did not think so. She said that you had recommended her, and that you had a good many French acquaintances; and she seemed to think that Justine had never been in any situation as governess before; and all the time I was obliged to let everything go on as if I did not know a word about it. Florence, I cannot bear to deceive mamma, and I must tell her."

"If you do," said Florence, quickly, "you will break your word, and destroy Justine's prospects for life."

"I am very sorry for Justine," said Ruth; "I would help her if I possibly could, but there is nothing else to be done; and for my promise, you know that it was made only for a time. I had no idea of always keeping a secret from my mother."

"Then you should not have given your word," persisted Florence. "Justine and I have depended upon you, and have made all our arrangements under the belief that you would not break it. If you betray us, Justine will be injured for life."

"You have never told me yet how that could be," said Ruth; "all I have heard has been from Alice."

"I shall wait for Justine to tell you," replied

Florence. "Her own account will convince you of the truth, far better than anything I can say."

"I cannot hear her account," said Ruth.

"Go back with us this evening, and you shall; I will manage it. At any rate, do not be unjust and condemn her unheard."

"If I had not deceived mamma!" said Ruth, speaking to herself.

"It was not intentional deceit," replied Florence; "but whether it was so or not, this is a case of justice. Justine wrote to you herself, I know, begging you to give her some advice. If you betray her beforehand, I must say it will be, according to my notions, very dishonourable."

"She might trust mamma as well as me, if it were right to keep her secret," said Ruth.

"That is not the question. Justine knows nothing of your mamma, and she does know a great deal of you. She has the greatest respect for you, and I know would take any hints from you; even as to her management of Agnes."

"I cannot believe that," said Ruth.

"I do not ask you to believe it on my word. I only ask you to wait till you have seen Justine yourself. You have no idea what she thinks of you. Ruth, you cannot be so unkind as to persist."

Ruth looked unhappy, and sat down to rest under the shade of a tree, but would say nothing. Florence repeated her arguments, and became more and more earnest.

"Your mamma and my aunt are coming," she said, on hearing voices; "have you no pity, Ruth?"

But she could not extract another promise. Mrs. De Lacy and Mrs. Clifford came up to them; the former quickened her pace on seeing them, and hastily addressing Florence, said:

"I have been hearing a strange story from Mrs.

Clifford, my dear Florence, about a young French governess; Mrs. Clifford heard it from Miss Merton; it made me extremely uncomfortable for the moment. I began to think—”

“Oh! yes, I know that story,” interrupted Florence. “You remember, Ruth—the French girl who was at Mrs. Carter’s.”

Ruth rose up suddenly in great agitation. Mrs. Clifford thought she understood the cause, and hastening to change a conversation which might bring painful recollections to Ruth’s mind, said:

“I have been satisfying Mrs. De Lacy’s mind; I told her that Ruth had seen this young lady whom she has engaged as a governess, and knew that she was not the same who visited at Mrs. Carter’s.”

“Yes, that day we first met at Redford; Ruth saw her for an instant,” said Florence to her aunt; “but indeed Aunt De Lacy I cannot think why Miss Merton should repeat things against persons who cannot defend themselves.”

“I dare say she meant no harm,” replied Mrs. De Lacy, good-naturedly; “but you can imagine I was a little startled for the moment. However, Mrs. Clifford’s assurance quite satisfied me. But how does it happen,” she added, looking round, “that Miss Lennox is not with you?”

“We sent her after you, Ruth, with a sketch-book,” said Mrs. Clifford; “you must have seen her surely.”

“We walked fast,” observed Florence, delighted at the prospect of introducing another subject; “had we not better turn back and look for her?”

Mrs. Clifford objected to this, saying that Ruth appeared already so tired, she thought it would not do for her to go any farther. Colonel Merton just then came up alone. The ladies of his party, he said, were afraid of mounting the hill. He had seen

nothing of Alice, but seemed to think it very likely she had mistaken her way.

"Yes, just at that turning," exclaimed Florence, "where two paths meet. I remember thinking at the time it was very possible."

Colonel Merton proposed to return, but Mrs. Clifford appeared uneasy, and said that she would rather go herself, as Alice was under her charge. "Ruth, my love," she added, "you had better not attempt reaching the top of the hill. Wait here till we all come back." Ruth assented, and Florence insisted on remaining with her.

Once more Florence and Ruth were alone. Ruth leant her head upon her hand, gazing vacantly on the scene beneath them. The smooth grass of the watch-tower hill, sloped to the edge of the ravine they had just crossed, on the other side of which the grey castle walls were discovered at intervals, amidst the mass of underwood that clothed the descent. Two ruined towers, and the top of the battlemented gateway, were seen to the left, and to the right rose the large trees shadowing the tilt-yard. Between the castle and the sea, where the sides of the ravine were less steep, the land projected in a sharp point, forming the extremity of a small bay. Several fishing boats lay stranded upon the beach, and two or three skiffs were passing near the shore; and in the far distance, where the blue line of the sea blended with the warm misty tints of the horizon, two ships of war, crowded with sails, were slowly traversing the wide ocean. It was a very lovely view, and Florence remarked upon it; but Ruth's only reply was a sigh, that proceeded from the depths of her heart. Florence asked what was the matter, and Ruth's distress broke forth in a torrent of words:—"Florence was deceitful, misjudging; she had entered upon a wrong course; she ought certainly to give up Justine; it

was really wicked to mislead her aunt, besides being foolish. The truth might be discovered at any moment. If Miss Merton were to see Justine, it must be known. For herself, she was wretched, and resolved no longer to bear the concealment. To all which, Florence replied much in the same strain as before; urging that Ruth could be no judge of what was right, until she had spoken to Justine herself; promising that if there was no opportunity of a conversation, Justine should write full details of every circumstance, and ending with stating, that she had no wish to deceive her aunt for a continuance; she only wished her not to look at Justine with prejudiced eyes. When they should be in France, and Justine should have gained herself a place in Mrs. De Lacy's estimation, as she assuredly would do if Ruth would only give her a few notions as to the management of Agnes, the truth was to be told; it was simply the dread of Mrs. Carter's prejudices which induced them both for the present to desire secrecy. This sounded very plausible. Ruth piqued herself upon being reasonable; she was inclined to come round again; but then the deceit.—Florence perceived that she had gained a step, and turned to another point, one which she really felt herself, and which therefore she spoke of with seriousness. It was the importance to Justine of obtaining a situation; the distress to which she might be reduced if she could not do so.

"Justine will go back to her miserable home, Ruth, and be wretched," she said. "No one will help her, and she will be so poor that she will hardly have bread to eat. She told me one day that there have been times, when she has had nothing to do, that she and her father have really not known how to get a dinner."

Ruth's eyes filled with tears. "I would give her

all my money," she said, "if I could; but I have promised it in the village."

Florence smiled with an air of contempt, and asked if she thought a few shillings would keep Justine for life.

"I was only wishing," replied Ruth. "I would do anything to help her except deceive mamma."

"Then be satisfied," exclaimed Florence. "To-night you shall hear all from Justine herself, and she shall write a letter which you may be able to show your mamma, explaining everything; and when we are in France, and I tell my aunt, you shall tell Mrs. Clifford; only be kind now."

Ruth wavered. She asked when she should have this written explanation.

"Immediately—to-morrow, if possible. Indeed, you shall have it."

At that instant a distinct shrill cry broke upon the ear. Ruth started up.

"Florence, what was that?" She seized the arm of Florence and trembled extremely.

"I don't know; it is an accident. Something has happened—hark!"

The cry sounded again more faintly. Colonel Merton ran down the hill. "Did you hear it?" he said, as he passed.

"Yes. What is it?—where? Aunt De Lacy what is it?"

Colonel Merton had rushed on. Mrs. De Lacy was beckoning them to follow her by a shorter and steeper path than that by which they had ascended. Florence dragged Ruth after her. Breathless and giddy they reached the foot of the ravine.

"Go, Florence! For pity's sake find out what has happened," exclaimed Mrs. De Lacy. "Take the path to the left; follow Colonel Merton."

Ruth's strength was nearly exhausted; but she

gave no heed to Mrs. De Lacy's entreaties that she would remain behind; and still holding the hand of Florence, they pursued their way amidst the tangled briers along the narrow pathway worn along the top of the ravine. A large oak tree stood on the bank, its gnarled trunk and knotted branches spreading themselves out so as completely to obstruct both the pathway and the view. Florence held by the trunk, and with difficulty scrambled over the brambles which grew upon the steep edge of the descent. Voices were heard very near below them.

"Be quick, Ruth, pray!" she exclaimed.

Ruth's dress was caught in the briers; it was rent completely across, and they hurried forward.

"Stop, Ruth—hark!" and Florence stepped forward upon a bank which commanded the whole length of the ravine. A faint scream made Ruth spring to her side, without the power of asking the cause.

Below, upon a smooth space of grass, Alice lay pale as death, her head resting upon Mrs. Clifford's lap; her eyes nearly closed, and the marks of severe bruises upon her face. Colonel Merton and several gentlemen were near, and on the summit of the castle wall above there stood a party anxiously looking on and entreating to be told how they might render assistance. Ruth's first impulse was to slide down the bank and reach her mamma; but the descent was not practicable, and when she spoke no one answered or noticed her. Alice was not senseless, for she gave signs of suffering extreme pain. The sound of her voice, though it was heard only in a groan, relieved Ruth's extreme anxiety; whatever had happened, Alice was not dead. Mrs. Clifford retained her usual calm self-possession, and decided at once what it would be best to do. A pathway was hastily cleared by some of the gentlemen, and Colonel

Merton then lifted Alice gently in his arms and carried her, though slowly and with difficulty, up the steep bank.

Florence and Ruth could see no more. When the last of the party had disappeared, Ruth sat down on the grass and burst into tears. Florence looked about to discover how the accident had happened.

"She must have been clambering over the wall and have fallen," she said. "Yes, there are the marks all the way from the top. See, Ruth, above."

Ruth turned, and saw at once what had occurred. Alice finding herself alone, had amused herself by exploring the ruins, and having no one to guide her, had ventured upon a dangerous part; the loose stones had given way and she had been precipitated over the walls half way down the bank. The height of the walls at that particular spot was not very great, and her descent had been broken by the underwood; but a large stone lay close by the spot on which she had been extended, shewing the fearful peril from which, by a merciful Providence, she had been in a great measure saved.

Ruth passed her hand for an instant before her eyes; partly to shut out from view the horrible probability which imagination presented, partly from the deep feeling of awe, which made her utter a silent thanksgiving for Alice's preservation. Then, without speaking another word, she turned slowly away and retraced her steps to the spot where Mrs. De Lacy was waiting for them.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THERE were lights shining through the windows of the Manor the whole of that night; moving, flickering, now clear, now dim, at intervals entirely disappearing; but there was one which never changed; it burnt with a dull flame, immoveable as the dark, silent figure which sat by the table on which it was placed, neither reading, nor speaking, nor praying, save in the secrecy of the sorrowful heart, open only to the Eye of God. Lady Catharine watched by Alice's bed-side, though she was told that watching was unnecessary. Alice had received a severe injury, but she was young and of a vigorous constitution, and many who had suffered more severely had speedily recovered; a night's rest might do wonders. This was the opinion of Lady Catharine's medical attendant, and there was nothing in it to excite alarm; yet Lady Catharine resisted all Marsham's persuasions to leave the task of nursing to her, and not consenting even to rest on the sofa so as to be within call, which was all that was really required, devoted the weary hours of the night to meditation and prayer. There was much to engage her mind. We say that death is near us at every moment; but perhaps we seldom actually realize the truth, until we have been unexpectedly brought in contact with it. Alice had escaped an imminent peril; but the escape brought many most painful thoughts to Lady Catharine's remembrance. It almost forced her to recall the distressing doubts which had harassed her since her conversation with Mr. Clifford. One of the com-

mon arguments which she herself had often used, and had heard others use, to bring young persons to a sense of their religious obligations, was, "If you are not fit for Confirmation and the Holy Communion, you are not fit to die." Alice had been all but pronounced unfit for Confirmation; and God had been pleased to bring her awfully near to death. However insensible she might be to the risk she had run, and the Providence which had preserved her, Lady Catharine saw it full well. With that one most terrible doubt as to the state of Alice's heart, came the others which, from Lady Catharine's sincerity of purpose, necessarily accompanied them; and the most rigid earthly scrutinizer of human motives must have been satisfied by her survey of her own conduct with regard to Alice. On no occasion had it been made more carefully or more truly; for Mr. Clifford's suggestions had taken root in a mind, which, however naturally prejudiced, was never wilfully shut against truth.

They were sad thoughts for the still, silent night, and when morning dawned, Lady Catharine's face told the mental as well as physical fatigue which she had been enduring. But her spirit was still unflinching; she gave all the necessary orders for the day; took her breakfast as usual, and not till eleven o'clock, when the medical man had again seen Alice, and pronounced that she was going on well, allowed herself to have two or three hours' rest. And during all that time no one would have imagined that Lady Catharine had any thoughts or any fears beyond those which the state of circumstances might naturally occasion. When she went to Alice and asked whether she would like to have prayers read for her, or would prefer repeating them for herself, no one would have supposed that the answer was listened for with the most intense anxiety, as an indication of the

tone of Alice's mind. And when Alice asked for a book, and Lady Catharine remarked that she had not herself read the Psalms and Lessons for the day, no one would have discovered any change of countenance to show the sinking of heart with which the reply was received:—"I don't think I can attend to those things now. I should like something amusing."

Alice was suffering much pain at the time; possibly she might not have been able to fix her thoughts seriously; but Lady Catharine read in the words that the will was wanting, and she turned away because Alice should not see her tears.

"Has any one been here from the Parsonage, Marsham?" said Alice, groaning with pain, as she tried to move.

"A message to know how you were, Miss; nothing else."

"Some one will come, I hope," said Alice. "I wish Ruth would. Give me a book, please, Marsham."

The book was given, and the pages were turned over; but Alice's head was not in any state for reading. It was swollen from a severe bruise, and ached and throbbed till she could not bear it; and again she inquired for Ruth.

"Lady Catharine wanted to know if you would like to be read to just now, Miss Lennox," said Marsham. Please to keep your hand down, and be still; the doctor says you must be quiet."

"I can't Marsham, my head is so very bad. Lady Catharine wanted to read the Psalms and Lessons; but I can't attend."

"Her ladyship would have read anything you liked," observed Marsham. "She was all in a fidget to do something for you."

"She is not here, is she?" said Alice, in a whisper, and trying to look round.

"Oh, no, Miss, she is gone to lie down; you know she sat up with you all night."

Alice looked surprised. "Did she? I was so stupid, so dizzy, I did not know who was here exactly. Is she very tired?"

"More so a great deal than she will say, I suspect," said Marsham. "Her ladyship is not a person to make complaints, you know, Miss Lennox,"

"It was very kind of her. Oh, my head! Marsham, do make the bandage loose."

"My lady would not let anybody do anything for you but herself, if she could help it," said Marsham in a tone of some irritation. "There is nobody like her for a nurse when anything is the matter."

"Yes, I dare say. Marsham, how you hurt me!"

"Marsham loosened the bandage, but not the more gently for Alice's exclamation. "My lady was always famed for her kind heart," continued Marsham. "I have lived with her now fifteen years, and I never knew her once hear of any one being ill without helping to the very utmost."

"That is why she wants to nurse me, then," said Alice, shortly, but less pettishly.

"Oh! Miss Lennox; you don't think that?"

"No, why not?" asked Alice.

"Because you know you are different from anybody else with my lady. We all say, very often, that it is quite wonderful how fond she is of you; but then she was so fond of your poor mamma."

"Fond of me!" repeated Alice to herself; and then she added aloud, "Marsham, do you remember my mamma well?"

"Remember her, Miss Lennox! yes, indeed. It would be strange indeed if I could forget her. Such a sweet face she had, and her ways so gentle!"

—This was said with rather a severe glance at Alice, which, however, was not noticed.—"I used to take

her fruit from my lady nearly every day," continued Marsham. "It was my lady's own wish that I should go, because she said I could tell better than any one else what was wanted. There she used to be sitting up by the window, with the little round table, that my lady gave her on her birthday, always by her side, and her books upon it, and the greenhouse flowers put in so beautifully. My lady dressed the flowers for her every day when she went to see her. Your poor mamma had a great fancy for flowers; and when she took to her bed she used to have them always lying by her. And then my lady would sit by and look at her; and sometimes I used to catch a few words when I came in, and it was almost always about you, Miss Lennox."

Alice again put her hand to her head to alter the bandage; but this time she did not complain.

"One day, I remember especially," continued Marsham, "your poor mamma had been very ill—so faint they could hardly keep her alive; but she was a little better, and my lady was putting eau de Cologne and water to her forehead. Your mamma looked up and smiled, and said something about 'always kind,' and just then you peeped in at the door, and my lady made a sign to you to go away, and when you were gone I heard her say, 'You will not mind my sending Alice away, it is only for your sake.' Your mamma's answer was spoken out so strong, Miss Lennox. 'She is your child,' she said; and my lady stooped down, and whispered something very low, which I could not hear; but your mamma answered, 'God bless you and reward you,' and then you were called in and my lady kissed you."

"I think I remember the kiss," said Alice, thoughtfully.

"My lady's manner changed to you from that day, Miss Alice," continued Marsham. "It seemed

to me as if she began to give you the love which was your poor mamma's. I don't mean that she did not go on loving her; but it was in a different way. Your mamma was so ill, there seemed to be no reason to care about any common things for her; only just to make her as comfortable as could be for the time. There were no troubles about money and dress, and such things for her; she was gone beyond them. She looked like an angel; and my lady used sometimes to say to me that she could hardly fancy it right to talk about common things before her; and so all her anxiety, in a way, went to you, Miss Alice."

Alice shut her eyes; it might have been either from pain of body or of mind.

"Shall you be going to sleep now, do you think?" enquired Marsham.

"I don't know—I am not sleepy. When will Lady Catharine come back?"

"Not for a long time, I hope," answered Marsham. "She will wear herself out if she goes on as she has begun."

"Then, Marsham, you may give me the Prayer Book, and I will try to read the Psalms."

Marsham gave it, with an injunction that she was to leave off directly she found the reading tire her head; and Alice soon laid the book down, and fell into a disturbed sleep.

CHAPTER XXX.

LADY CATHARINE was sitting in Alice's morning room; it was the first day that Alice had been allowed to leave her bed. It gave her much pain still to be dressed, and she was weakened by all she had suffered. A short illness will sometimes make a great change in a young person, and Alice was looking very unwell. She lay upon the sofa at work, and seemed to be thinking more than usual. Lady Catharine regarded her silently and anxiously. Now and then Alice asked a few questions, rather, it seemed, because she thought she ought to talk, than from any wish for conversation, and frequently had recourse to a book. When Lady Catharine was called out of the room, Alice drew a paper from her work-basket, and read it with much attention. It was in Madeline's handwriting. Lady Catharine's re-entrance made her fold it up, and put it again in its hiding-place. In her haste she threw down the basket, and scattered the contents upon the floor. She was not able to pick them up herself, but Lady Catharine did, and as she took up the papers, she said,

"Is this from Madeline?"

"Yes;" and Alice coloured. "It was something she sent me yesterday; will you give it to me?" She held out her hand, which trembled a little.

Lady Catharine took hold of it affectionately, and said, "Poor child!" and kissed her.

Alice held the paper as if fearing either that it should be taken from her, or that some enquiry might be made about it.

Lady Catharine smoothed her pillow, and proposed that she should have some grapes, which had just been brought in from the hot-house.

Alice said "Yes;" and thanked her, and looked as if she would have said more, but was afraid.

Lady Catharine was not quick at interpreting looks. She heard only Alice's "Thank you;" and it was cold to her warm feelings. She sighed, and sat down; and after a little while left the room again. She had not been long absent, before a lighter and freer step was heard in the gallery; a gentle knock was given at the door of Alice's room, and, scarcely waiting for the permission to be given, Madeline opened it. The change in Alice's manner was instantaneous. Madeline was told how Alice had slept, how she was then feeling, whether she had enjoyed her dinner; and being satisfied upon these points, she produced some particularly choice flowers, gathered from her own garden. Lady Catharine would have had real cause to sigh if she had witnessed the hearty gratitude with which this trifling present was received; yet it might have proved to her, that, whatever might be Alice's defect of manner to herself, there was no real coldness of heart.

"And you have been reading the extracts?" said Madeline, observing the corner of the paper half hidden in the work-basket. "I was glad papa let me copy them for you. Are they not very nice?"

"Yes, I think so; I have not read much of them. Lady Catharine said your papa preached a beautiful sermon on Sunday."

"I longed for you to hear it," continued Madeline.

"Did you?" and Alice faintly smiled; "It would have been no good."

"Oh! but, Alice, pray don't talk so. I thought all that papa says would have brought you round."

"It is very kind in you, Maddy," replied Alice; "I really am very much obliged to you for taking so much trouble, writing all this out for me, but as things are fixed they must remain."

"And Ruth is so strange too," observed Madeline. "I hoped she would have talked to you, but I can scarcely make her attend to me. She sits thinking all day nearly."

"Ruth knows it is best to let things remain as they are," repeated Alice."

"Have you asked her?" enquired Madeline.

"No, I have only seen her for a few minutes, twice. We did not talk about the Confirmation then. Had you any letters to-day?"

This last question was put very abruptly; and Madeline hastily answered in the negative, and then observed, "I think Ruth would agree with me, and papa too."

"It can make no difference," replied Alice; "I may be very wicked, but I am not a hypocrite."

"If you wish to be confirmed, there is no hypocrisy in saying so," observed Madeline.

Alice shook her head, and answered, that if she ever intended to be good, she would be good thoroughly. Lady Catharine had been so kind lately, that she could not pretend anything with her; besides, she was ill; she should not be well enough for the Confirmation.

Madeline sat for some minutes with an air of great disappointment; then, leaving her seat, she stood beside Alice, and looking at her earnestly and sorrowfully, said, "If you were ill, Alice, very ill indeed, you would be extremely sorry not to have been confirmed."

"I do not see why I should be much more sorry about it then than now," answered Alice.

"Don't you? It seems to me as if you must be. If you were confirmed you might receive the Holy Communion."

Alice raised herself on the sofa, and said eagerly, "Maddy, do not talk of that."

"But I must, Alice; you must let me indeed," continued Madeline. "I would try not to vex you, but it will be such a weight on my mind if you do not let me tell you;" and, finding Alice did not again interrupt her, she went on: "The evening you were brought home I seemed to think only about your pain; I did not imagine there could be any danger; but the next day Marsham told mamma she thought you were more hurt than people fancied, and she was afraid of fever. Mamma said this to papa before me; I don't think she quite meant me to hear, but I happened to be coming into the room. I was dreadfully frightened, and I began talking to papa all about you, and about—you must not mind, Alice; you know it was only our fear—about—that perhaps you might not get well. He seemed very unhappy indeed. I had never seen him in such a way before, and at last something was mentioned about the Confirmation; and then, Alice, do you know, I saw the tears in his eyes,—real tears; I had never seen any man cry before, and I scarcely believed till then that men could cry; but papa was just like one of us then, and he said it was such a grief to him to think that you had not appeared to care about your confirmation, because it shewed that your mind was not in a right state; and he went on to say that it would have been a great blessing if you had been confirmed, or if you were really fit for it and anxious about it; because then, if you were to be worse, he might give you the Holy Communion."

"If I was not confirmed?" enquired Alice.

"Yes, because it does not say in the Prayer Book,

that persons must be confirmed first; only that they must be, if they can."

Alice appeared to be struck by a new and very serious idea, but one which perplexed her. "I should not be sure of going to Heaven;" she replied, "even if I were to receive the Communion."

"That was what I said," exclaimed Madeline. "I could not understand papa at first. I could not think how it could be of such great consequence; but papa grew so very, very earnest. He said that, of course, receiving the Holy Communion would not save us; and if we received it unprepared it would be harm to us instead of good; but that none of us knew the great blessing we missed by neglecting it. And then he read to me parts of the sixth chapter of St. John, which is all about it; and certainly the words seemed much more solemn than they had ever done before. They made me feel as if I could not bear to die before I had received it, and as if I could not bear that you, or any one I loved, should do so either."

"And did you come to talk about this to day?" enquired Alice.

"Partly. I was afraid; but still it was in my mind so much, I thought I must say it. Oh Alice, dear Alice; if you would only think of these things!"

The conversation was interrupted by the return of Lady Catharine. Madeline rose hurriedly and wished Alice good-bye; then recollecting herself enquired if she could take back any message or parcel to the Parsonage; and hearing that there was nothing to be said, only the report that Alice was much the same, she departed.

Alice closed her eyes but not to sleep; rather to repeat, and think upon, and vainly try to forget the eager winning words, "Oh Alice! dear Alice! if you would only think of these things!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

ALICE's first visitor from the Parsonage the following day was Ruth. They met in Alice's bed-room, for she was not able to leave it till late in the morning. Ruth came in very differently from Madeline—slowly, and with a very grave pre-occupied air. She asked the ordinary questions as to how Alice had slept, and whether she was in much pain; and then she put a shabby-looking paper into Alice's hand, saying: "Read that, and tell me what you think of it. It came from Mrs. De Lacy's housekeeper, and contained an apology for returning a parcel which Mrs. Clifford had forwarded to Sheldon, as Mrs. De Lacy and her family were gone." The note dropped from Alice's hand.

"Gone!" she exclaimed, "gone! where to?—what does it mean?—without your hearing from Justine?"

"Yes, without a word. I told you Florence promised she should write; but I have not had a line or a message."

Alice's face expressed a strange mixture of feeling; satisfaction for a moment, then regret.

"And what do you mean to do?" she enquired.

"I don't know; I cannot think."

"Justine must be gone with them," said Alice.

"I suppose so; but one cannot say."

"Gone as Agnes De Lacy's governess," said Alice, her countenance becoming even more grave than Ruth's.

"Yes, I hope it is all right; one could not have prevented it; and, of course, they will write;" but

Ruth did not say this, as if her conscience was clear, and she repeated a second time, "I hope it is all right."

"It cannot be," said Alice; "I must try and tell you now, Ruth, what I could not yesterday; what I heard from Miss Merton."

"Ruth brought a chair to the bed-side, and listened attentively, yet with the air of one who has no wish to be convinced. Alice was always suffering most in the morning, and her head ached and was very confused. She told her story with difficulty, and without being clear in the several details. Ruth cross-questioned her rather captiously, and not without commenting severely upon Miss Merton's imprudence and want of charity in saying so much to a perfect stranger. "She could not thoroughly believe second-hand stories," she said; "Alice had heard from Miss Merton what Miss Merton had heard from some one else, and what some one else had heard perhaps from another party. It would be a great satisfaction to have Justine's own version to put against all these accusations."

"And you expect it?" enquired Alice.

"Yes, certainly; I can account for not hearing. They set off suddenly, and had not time to write."

"Then you will say nothing till you do hear?" continued Alice.

The question made Ruth shrink. She began to reason, as she always did when unpleasant things were brought before her. She said why it would be right to tell her mamma at once, and why it would not be right; but the one right was put in few words—the other in many; and the many gained the victory, Ruth believing still that she had stated the case fairly. "Florence," she said, "had certainly appeared candid and well-intentioned, in all that had passed when they met at St. Cuthbert's, and Justine

might be open to good influence, even at a distance. It would be a pity to throw them off, unless it was absolutely necessary. When all the statements on both sides could be placed before Mrs. Clifford and Lady Catharine, then would be the time to acknowledge what they had done; till then it would not be fair. It would be best therefore to wait."

This was the determination with which they parted—Ruth to return to the Parsonage, Alice to be assisted by Marsham in dressing for her early dinner.

Ruth seemed strangely forgetful—strangely unmindful of the tacit falsehood which had pressed so heavily on her conscience on the day of the picnic at St. Cuthbert's. But she was not really so. She was often very unhappy; the more so, because, even according to her own false views of duty, her motives were not as pure as they had been. Ruth was becoming afraid of looking at her own conduct; afraid of acknowledging what she had been a party to. Every fresh step which Florence took, and every new light which was thrown upon Justine's character, told against them. Ruth said to Alice that it was only *possible* Justine might be gone with Mrs. De Lacy, but she had no doubt of the fact herself. She implied also that Miss Merton's testimony was not fully to be credited, but she knew that it was supported by Mrs. Carter and probably by Mary Vernon. Still Ruth's cleverness came to her aid; and crushing the pang which accompanied the recollection of her deceit to her mother, by persuading herself that all would be well when she was able to acknowledge it, she carried on her plausible arguments till she really fancied herself convinced that, to use her old favourite phrase, she was acting for the best. Ruth's self-deception was great, and her mode of self-examination did not enable her to discover what she was really doing. The past was really past

to her. Because it was beyond recall, she was apt to forget that it was not therefore beyond repentance. We travel away from our actions, and because we do not still see them, think that they have ceased to be. Alas! for us, if we do not awaken to a sense of the truth, until we are brought face to face again with our own lives before the judgment-seat of God.

All this time Ruth was exercising an influence which she little suspected.

Madeline's earnestness was not entirely thrown away upon Alice. She had to bear hours of pain, and watchfulness, and solitude; and in those hours she had leisure for thought. She knew that she had been saved from a great peril, and she was not unthankful for the mercy; and, at times, she began to ponder very seriously upon the uncertainty of life, the danger of procrastination, and the peace, and hope, and comfort, which Madeline seemed to find in religion. "Almost, she was persuaded to be a Christian;"—a Christian, that is, in the inward devotion of the heart, as well as in that real and solemn sense in which all are Christians who have been admitted into covenant with God by baptism. But there was a stumbling-block in her way. Alice gave a true character of herself when she said that she was no hypocrite. She might be indifferent, and take the ordinances of religion as things of course, but she could not bring herself, after what had passed, to make any peculiar profession of sincerity, unless she intended to act up to it. She had deceived Lady Catharine in regard to her acquaintance with Florence. She could not go to be confirmed with a clear conscience, unless this fault was acknowledged. But the acknowledgment would bring to light all which Ruth still thought fit to keep secret, and therefore it could not be made. Alice was in a measure relieved when she came to this decision. It set the question of her

confirmation nearly at rest. June was passing on rapidly; day after day went by and nothing was heard either of Florence or Justine. Alice said to Madeline that there were reasons why she could not be confirmed; that she had made up her mind not to be; to Ruth she said nothing, because the subject was disagreeable to both; to Mr. Clifford she was even more reserved than before; to Lady Catharine she was coldly acquiescent; and in her own heart she was wretched.

This state of things lasted for nearly a fortnight. During that time Alice made considerable progress towards recovery, and was allowed to go out of doors. She moved with difficulty, and was soon tired, but the change was pleasant to her; and if she had been happy in her mind, she might have begun to look upon her position in life with greater satisfaction. Lady Catharine's attention was unceasing; she was at Alice's call at any hour, and on any occasion. Nothing appeared a trouble; no request was considered inconvenient. Illness destroys the formality of a strict household; and as Alice could not offend against laws which she was not now required to keep, Lady Catharine's genuine kindness of heart had its full scope.

Alice was touched by this unselfish affection. It would probably have gone far in breaking down the barriers of reserve between herself and Lady Catharine, if there had been no circumstances to throw a restraint over all which she herself did and said. The thoughts which were working in her breast, the longings for a stricter, holier life, the repentance for past negligences, would have been welcomed as the sunshine of life, but they were never known. And Lady Catharine pursued her daily course of unremitting affectionate watchfulness, burdened with the secret dread that all the mercy which had been shown

to Alice was unacknowledged—that her heart was insensible to religion, and that if death were then to meet her, it would find her unprepared, unrepentant, without faith in her Saviour, without a wish or thought for Confirmation, without any desire for that chief support of a Christian in life or death—the inestimable gift of God in the Holy Communion.

Persons who saw her said, that Lady Catharine looked harassed, and was grown more melancholy than ever. No wonder. Anxiety for Alice was corroding all the enjoyment of her life.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"It is growing late, Alice, my dear," said Lady Catharine, as Ruth and Madeline were preparing to draw Alice again in her chair round the garden, one foggy afternoon. "Are you not tired? You have been out a long time."

"A little while longer, if you please," said Alice, entreatingly. "I don't feel very tired, and it is extremely pleasant."

"You ought not to be at all tired, my love; you have not had much to make you so. Mr. Nichols says you ought to improve faster."

"I am a great deal better. I shall be able to walk alone before very long," replied Alice."

"I hope before the Confirmation," Madeline was going to say; but she checked herself.

Lady Catharine looked unhappy, and walked aside a few paces; then returning, she told Alice that she was going into the village for a little while, and that when she came back it would be quite time for her to go in.

The conversation did not proceed very freely even when Lady Catharine was gone; for the Confirmation was now a forbidden subject, and the allusion to it was painful to them all. At another time it would have afforded a fertile subject for discussion. Alice was interested in many of the village girls who were going to be confirmed; but she did not choose to make enquiries about them. The restraint was destroying the pleasure of their being together, and when Alice said she would go in, no one objected.

Marsham, Alice's constant attendant, was not in the house, and whilst waiting for her to assist in helping Alice up stairs, and taking off her walking dress, they all sat by the open window in the drawing-room. Alice did not consider whether it was prudent or not, and Ruth and Madeline had never yet learnt the lessons of caution which sad experience of illness alone can give. The cold air blew pleasantly upon them, and when Ruth said that they were sitting in a draught, Alice declared it was very agreeable. Lady Catharine returned, went into the garden, and heard that Miss Lennox was gone in. This sounded very prudent, and Lady Catharine was satisfied, and went away again to attend to some other duties. Marsham also came home, and supposing that Alice was safely in her room, as she was not in the garden, sat down to tea, and did not think of going to her till the bell rang. By the time the striking of the clock reminded Ruth that they must go back to the Parsonage, Alice was chilly and uncomfortable, and more inclined to wish for a fire, than to delight in a cool breeze.

When Alice went to bed, her limbs were aching, she had a violent pain in her chest, and considerable fever. Lady Catharine was uneasy, and Marsham angry. Alice was generally considered strong; but no constitution, as Marsham emphatically declared, can stand sitting in a draught. She was not at all better the next morning. Orders were given that she should be kept in bed, and she had no wish to rebel; only she wished for society, and asked many times for Madeline and Ruth. They were later in their visit this day than usual. Lady Catharine told Alice that Mr. Clifford was gone to see his sister-in-law; Mrs. Clifford was not very well, and Ruth and Madeline did not like to leave her. The information was very disappointing to Alice, and

if she had ever doubted the truth of anything spoken at the Parsonage, she could have doubted this. Mrs. Clifford could not want them both; so unselfish as she was, surely she could spare one of them for an hour! Alice asked again and again whether anything or any person had come from the Parsonage, and fretted herself into an increased fever at the continual answer in the negative. At length she did learn something; one of the housemaids, when Marsham was absent, told her that Mr. Clifford had called that morning very early, immediately after breakfast. She heard him say that he was sorry he was obliged to go to Mrs. Mordaunt's. He had a long talk with Lady Catharine for nearly an hour—and some one from the Parsonage had brought word in the course of the day that Mrs. Clifford and the young ladies had seemed very much worried after the letters came in. The curiosity of Alice—a curiosity not unmingled with fear—was excited to the highest pitch by this information. It was told her shortly, and when the servant was gone she had no one of whom she could venture to ask questions. Marsham was more strict and particular than even Lady Catharine herself, and to all Alice's enquiries as to news from the Parsonage, replied she must keep herself quiet, or she would be dreadfully ill. Lady Catharine came in and out of the room very frequently; but her face was not to be read, though her manner was altered, and sometimes she stood and looked fixedly at Alice for a few moments, and in her deep, sorrowful voice, asked how she was; but she did not offer to read to her, and she did not sit by the bed working. The spirit of restlessness and disquietude seemed to possess her. Alice bore with this uncertainty the greater part of the day; but every hour increased her uneasiness. Letters, she thought, could only mean letters

from France, probably containing some unpleasant news from Florence. Lady Catharine's strange silence, she was sure, was caused by something on her mind, and it must be something about her. Mr. Clifford must have heard from Ruth how they had been acting; he must have called in the morning to speak to Lady Catharine about it. Alice had nothing to distract her mind from these conjectures, except the pain in her head and the oppression on her chest, which began rapidly to increase. The measures which were taken to relieve this were a little occupation to her; but she could not sleep, and her enquiries for Ruth became more and more urgent. She was always impatient, and illness only increased the feeling; and at length she summoned courage to ask Lady Catharine if anything was the matter. Lady Catharine's cold answer was, "Nothing that I can talk to you about now, my dear," and Alice's suspicions became a certainty. She mentioned Ruth's name, and Lady Catharine's face was ominous of evil. Ruth might possibly come in the evening, she said; but Alice must rest contented without her. Alice could bear it no longer, and in her agitation she forgot all prudence, and entreated that Ruth might come to her, if it were only for half an hour. She could not be happy; she could not possibly sleep till she had seen her. Lady Catharine gave no promise; but at length went away, leaving Alice with a hope that she was about to send a message to bring Ruth to the Manor.

Alice became quieter then; she was really ill and unequal to much thought, and in the expectation of Ruth's arrival, her mind sank into that passive state which helplessness and weakness will sometimes bring.

As the time drew near when Ruth might come, her excitement revived again. She listened to every sound, fancying that she heard footsteps and voices

when there were none ; and made Marsham prop up her pillows and help her to sit upright. She was so eager, and her cheek was so flushed, that Marsham's injunctions to keep quiet were repeated oftener than ever. All Alice would say was, "I am quiet ; I only want to see Ruth. Is not that her step in the passage ? Pray, Marsham, look." Marsham soon gave up looking ; for Ruth did not come, though a much longer time elapsed than would have brought her from the Parsonage. When Alice heard at last that Miss Clifford was in the house, but that Lady Catharine was talking to her in the breakfast-room, she burst into tears, declaring that they were all cruel—Ruth worse than any ; and Marsham went away, thinking that Lady Catharine's authority was necessary. Alice's uncertainty lasted for about ten minutes longer ; at the expiration of that time Ruth tapped gently at the door. She came into the room with her bonnet on, and her veil down, and Alice could not clearly see her face. She went up to the bed. Alice flung her arm round her and exclaimed,

"Thank you ; now it will all be well. Tell me the whole, Ruth, at once."

Ruth sat down without uttering a word.

"Take off your bonnet—I can't see you—the room is dark—I want to look at you," said Alice.

Ruth untied the strings of her bonnet.

"But the veil—I can't see you now ; please take it all off. Ruth, dear, how strange you are."

Ruth put up her hand, but it shook violently.

Alice touched her. "Ruth, pray speak—what is it ?"

Ruth slowly took off her bonnet, turning aside her head as she did so, and said, in a constrained voice, "Alice, are you better ?"

"Yes ; but Ruth, don't speak so ; you frighten me. Why won't you look at me ?"

Ruth looked, and tried to force a smile. Her cheek was quite colourless, except where there was a red dark line under the eye, which, with the swollen eyelids, marked that she had been crying.

Alice became calmer in manner as she was more frightened. "Ruth," she said, "you have had bad news?"

"We are all well at the Parsonage," was Ruth's answer. "We think about you very much."

"But you are altered; I can't understand you. You have had news, I am sure you have, from Florence or Justine."

Alice was looking steadily at Ruth as she spoke; she saw her countenance change. "It is about them; there is something. Oh, Ruth! tell me."

"Alice, you must be quiet; Lady Catharine will never forgive me."

"But I must know;" and Alice's eyes flashed, and she grasped Ruth's hand with an unnatural strength. "Ruth, if you do not tell me I shall go wild. What have you heard? Where is Justine?"

Ruth shuddered. She bent her head upon the pillow, and said, "Justine is dead!"

The next instant the bell in Alice's room rang violently; she had fainted.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WHEN Ruth was recalled to Alice's chamber, she met Lady Catharine at the door. Her manner was gravely upbraiding. "I trusted you, Ruth," she said, "because I thought you had common sense and self-command; but you have been most imprudent. Alice, however, will not be satisfied without seeing you again, and you must go to her. Remember her life even may depend upon your caution." She moved aside, and Ruth passed her in silence.

Alice now lay quite still, and spoke feebly; but there was a spot of crimson on her cheek, and her eyes were dull and glassy. "Tell me about it," she said, as Ruth sat down by her side; "it is true, Lady Catharine says so; I thought it was a dream. Was it sudden? tell me at once,—quickly."

"Stop, pray be patient, dear Alice; they will think it is my fault again if you are worse."

"But was it illness?—only tell me."

"No, not illness; pray don't look so eager," said Ruth, in a broken voice, whilst her breath came and went rapidly. "She was not ill;—they were in Paris;—it was an accident." She paused for a moment, and then added, "She was thrown out of a carriage and—"

"Hurt, was she? Did she live long? How terrible!" and Alice put her hands before her eyes.

"No, no; she did not live. Alice, it is so very dreadful; she was killed, killed on the spot."

Ruth sank back in her chair, and tears came to

her relief. Alice lay without speech or movement, except that her hands fell powerless by her side. Scarcely a fortnight before, and she too had stood upon the brink of a sudden destruction. Justine had been taken, she had been left. The case might have been reversed, and then—Alice could not face the thought which presented itself. She turned to Ruth, and said hastily, "I should be glad to hear more. Is there more to know?"

"Yes, much; a great deal; 'the worst of all,'" exclaimed Ruth, bitterly. "Oh, Alice! we have done very wrong; I have, at least; and yet I thought I was to make you good, to lead you all right."

"But about—" Alice hesitated to pronounce Justine's name.

"Yes, about her; I know you must want to hear. I was going to bring the letter, but they said I had better not. It was not meant for you to know, if they could have kept it from you. Florence writes very miserably. Justine, she says, was very trying on the journey, full of her own fancies, and they were quite dependent on her, because of her knowledge of the language and the country. Mrs. De Lacy did not mind at first, but after they had been in Paris a few days, there came a letter from that Miss Merton we met at St. Cuthbert's. She had seen Justine with them in London before they set off, and recognized her. She thought Mrs. De Lacy must have been deceived by her, and wrote to tell her about it. Mrs. De Lacy was extremely angry, and enquired what Florence knew of the matter; and from what Florence says, she must have made some excuse which satisfied her aunt for the time, and at last she consented to let Justine remain longer." Here Ruth again paused, as if to recover strength for the continuation of her story.

Alice whispered, "Go on, Florence is beyond my comprehension."

"And so she is beyond mine," exclaimed Ruth; "for,—Alice, this is to me the very worst part of all,—Miss Merton's story is quite true. I have heard this morning from Mary Vernon, telling me the whole, and more even than you heard. Mary says she writes to me because she is afraid when Florence is at Sheldon I may be drawn in to have something to do with her concerns. It was not merely at Mrs. Darnley's that Justine behaved ill; but ever since we left Mrs. Carter's, and I am afraid Florence encouraged her at last, because she owns herself to me that she was forced to assist her in seeing those friends in Paris whom Miss Merton spoke of; those, I mean, who were the cause of her leaving the Darnleys. Florence says she knows it was not right, but Justine was so very wilful, nothing could stop her when she had set her mind upon anything; and, if Florence refused, she would be moody, and not speak for hours; and then Mrs. De Lacy was cross, and everything went amiss; so Florence was obliged to humour her." Ruth hurried the last words and broke off with the exclamation; "Alice! if it had not been for me she might never have gone; yet I did not mean any harm."

"You were not like me," said Alice; "you did not deceive because you were afraid."

Ruth shrank from the implied superiority, and answered quickly, "Don't compare, Alice; I cannot bear it; there is more to be told, but you seem so tired you had better not hear any more."

"Go on, don't wait; let me hear all before any one comes," replied Alice, though she looked already exhausted with the fatigue and excitement of listening.

"They told me you were extremely ill," said Ruth,

her thoughts now for the first time fully directed to Alice's state.

"Yes, very ill. Go on," whispered Alice.

Ruth regarded her in fear. "You are very ill," she said, a dawning of the truth stealing upon her mind.

"Go on; give me a little water; I shall not be able to hear much, but go on."

Ruth gave her the water with a trembling hand. It required some moments to collect again her scattered thoughts, and her voice was nearly choked as she said, "I told you about Mrs. De Lacy, that she agreed to allow Justine to stay, partly, I am afraid, because Florence assured her that I knew her and had a good opinion of her, and had thought it best to keep her secret. Florence was going then to let me know all about it; at least so she says; but I can't quite tell what she would have done; she is very strange. But I think she sees she was wrong now; Justine's last act—" Ruth could hardly finish the sentence; it was indeed awful to think of the tremendous change which had overtaken the unhappy girl, in the very midst of her course of deception and wilfulness. "She went on, as I told you, in the same way in Paris as she did in England," continued Ruth, recovering herself. "The same friends were there whom she visited when she was at the Darnleys'. That was the one great reason for her wishing to be abroad, it seems. Mrs. De Lacy and Florence were going to Versailles one day; she was left with Agnes, and she promised not to go out any where; she told Florence that she would not; but she did go just the same, and met some of these people, and they persuaded her to take a drive with them, and it was then the accident happened; the horses ran away, and the carriage was upset. The friends who were with her were saved, only very much bruised." Ruth burst into tears again.

"Miss Clifford," said Marsham, coming into the room. "My lady has been scolding me for letting you stay, she thought you had done mischief enough before for one day."

Alice did indeed appear much worse, but she made Ruth stoop down to listen, and said in a low voice, "Ruth, I shall tell all to Lady Catharine if I can; then I shall be happy."

"Happy! Ah! Alice, that can never be for me."

"Yes, Ruth, dear, you will be when you have told; and I shall say my prayers better. There was always something in my way till now. Tell Madeline, if I can't;—she wanted me to think about being confirmed, I could not whilst there was a secret;—that was the reason, please tell her."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

It was drawing towards the close of the evening ; the lingering hues of sunset were fast fading away, and twilight was throwing its cheerless gloom over the dreariness of a sick chamber. The curtains of the window were undrawn, and a cold light fell upon the bed on which Alice lay ; her lips parched, her complexion thick, sallow, and colourless ; her eyes shut, and her breathing, at times, faint, irregular, and scarcely to be heard, and again struggling as with convulsive efforts.

The Manor was always silent, even amidst the occupation and interest of the summer noonday ; now, every sound had ceased. Neither the distant rumbling of a cart moving slowly through the village, nor the working of the blacksmith's forge, nor the shouts of the children on the green, broke the perfect stillness which reigned around. As the deepening shadows stole over the face of nature, the shadow of a coming grief stole over the weary heart of Lady Catharine Hyde. She was watching by the bed ; Marsham stood near, occasionally laying her hand gently upon Alice's pulse. Lady Catharine asked no questions ; she sat without leaning back in her chair, gazing steadily, and apparently unmoved, upon Alice's changed features. Presently she said, " Marsham, it is possible Mr. Clifford may be at home to-night, — I should wish to know."

Marsham was going to leave the room, but returning, enquired whether Lady Catharine would write, or whether she would prefer sending a message.

"I will write, bring me my desk," and Lady Catharine wrote a few words without trembling or agitation.

The note was sealed and directed; again Marsham was going, but she had read her mistress's countenance well. She stopped and said, "Would your ladyship lie down a little before Mr. Clifford comes?"

Lady Catharine shook her head.

"If I might order you something, my lady," continued Marsham; "you have had nothing all day."

"No, no; let me only see Mr. Clifford, if possible."

Marsham looked at Alice once more. "Miss Lennox is sleeping, my lady," she observed, in a low tone. "Mr. Nichols said sleep would do her more good than anything."

Lady Catharine smiled so sadly that Marsham's respect could no longer be a restraint upon her sympathy. "Oh! my lady," she exclaimed, "if you would only take a little rest! It must be bad for you any way; and if Miss Alice should be worse,"—

"She will be worse, Marsham."

"Not for certain," said Marsham, firmly.

"I have no hope—she will die," escaped from Lady Catharine, in a faint whisper of misery.

Marsham suffered the words to pass without contradiction.

Lady Catharine waited for an instant, and then she added, "Let my note be sent directly, you need not return yourself; and remember, I wish to have nothing said that may give alarm."

Marsham departed, and Lady Catharine moved to the other end of the room to fetch a book. When she came back Alice's position was altered; her head was buried in her pillow so as completely to hide her face, and the position of her hands was different, yet still she seemed to sleep. Lady Catharine no-

ticed the change, but satisfied herself that she was not really disturbed, and sat down again by the bedside. The long minutes passed on, and Lady Catharine read, or tried to read, and at length hearing Marsham's tread in the passage, she looked once more at Alice, and going to the door, opened it very softly, and closing it as noiselessly, went out.

As the almost inaudible sound told that the room was empty, a groan of anguish burst from Alice. She threw back the coverlid, and clasped her hands, as if in deep suffering, and raising her head with difficulty, gazed for a moment round the room, and then gasping for breath sank back upon her pillow with an expression of utter hopelessness. When Lady Catharine returned her face was again hidden.

Nearly a quarter of an hour afterwards Marsham brought an answer from the Parsonage. It had been delayed as Mrs. Clifford was not in the house when Lady Catharine's note arrived. Mr. Clifford was certainly not expected for two or three days. Lady Catharine threw herself back in her chair, the image of utter despondency, but recovering herself instantly, said, "Marsham, you were right, I must try to rest." She bent over Alice and kissed her, and without another observation walked slowly out of the room.

Silence once more settled upon the household, a silence which reigned for several hours. Alice was apparently in a state of torpor; it was not sleep, for her eyes opened from time to time, and she asked occasionally for water, but she did not reply to any questions, and Marsham could not determine how much or how little consciousness she retained.

And was Alice unconscious? Is the prisoner unconscious who ponders the sentence of his execution? or the traveller who finds himself suddenly upon the brink of a precipice from which there is no escape?

Die! Young, careless, unstable; her imagination

filled with visions for the future of a long life ; her heart just opening to the claims of human affection ; the past remembered but as a confused dream, of which no account could be given. Die ! Could that faint, dread whisper be true ?

What passed in these dreary hours of darkness,—the conflict between self-upbraiding thoughts and fruitless wishes,—it were hard indeed to tell. It was a fearful night for Alice ; a night never to be forgotten. She who had so long doubted and wavered, who had gone one step in the right way and then turned back to take many in the wrong, was now at length suddenly brought to a decision, happy only in that the decision was not entirely the result of fear ; that it had in a measure been resolved upon before the thought of death made her tremble at the prospect of judgment.

Morning dawned, sufficiently to cast a pale light over the chamber, and destroy the little remaining brilliancy of the expiring lamp. Worn with fever of body and anguish of mind, Alice at last fell into an uneasy slumber. She woke again restless and unrefreshed. Marsham's chair was empty, the curtains were drawn at the side of the bed and across the window, and the room was still gloomy in the twilight. A stifled sob fell upon her ear—the moan of a bitter grief, and then the words of a broken, fervent, almost a despairing prayer—a prayer for her. It asked—there was agony in the tone, and the intensity of a mother's love in the expression—for mercy upon one weak and erring, yet precious beyond the utterance of words. It asked for repentance—for time that might be dedicated to self-examination and abasement ; for faith in a Saviour's atonement ; for the spirit which should devote to His service the few lingering hours of a short life. And it betrayed feelings which would never have been spoken to a

human ear. In the presence of Him who alone knew the secrets of her lonely life, Lady Catharine could tell, with the simple confidence of a child, of the love which had sprung up in her early days, and was strengthened in her advancing youth, and cherished and nurtured amidst the chilling temptations of the world, and at length appeared to sleep in a parent's grave only to be re-awakened with a more anxious interest in the life of her child.

A mother's prayer might have been different—it could not have been more earnest. It was ended; but Lady Catharine still knelt. There was but one position now for her—one attitude to speak when words had failed—one posture to give a silent voice to the all-absorbing thought—that of Alice's safety, not in life but in death. She stood at length once more bending over Alice; and Alice raised her eyes blinded with tears. Lady Catharine spoke to her tenderly. Alice held her hand and tried to answer; it was but a whisper. Lady Catharine stooped to listen, and then came a burst of agonized feeling, and the awful question,

“Must I die?”

Lady Catharine started with horror at the echo of her own thoughts. “Die! Alice, my child, my treasure! Who says it?”

“You think I must; you love me, and you cannot deceive me.”

“Lady Catharine answered quietly, “Life and death are in the hands of God.”

“But will He take me?—is it certain?—do you know it must be?” repeated Alice; and still she held Lady Catharine's hand, and fixed her large, eager eyes upon her face, seeking to read her sentence there.

Lady Catharine sat down by the bed-side, for her limbs trembled; but still she spoke soothingly.

"Alice, my love, you are very ill. We cannot tell what it may please God to ordain; we can but resign ourselves to His will."

Alice turned away her head; she was answered.

"Shall I pray for you, Alice?" asked Lady Catharine.

Alice looked at her once more with a quieter, more settled expression. "Kiss me," she said, "kiss me—again, again—forgive me—pray Him to forgive me. I have done such bad things; I would do better, if I might live—I would try. Don't go," she added, as Lady Catharine gently withdrew her hand to wipe away her tears; "I would please you and love you; I would be like dear mamma, if I might only live."

"My own Alice, there is but one way of pleasing me now—trusting all to God."

"But I have done very wrong," said Alice, her voice growing eager, and her eyes flashing with excitement, as a crowd of confused recollections presented themselves to her mind. "There is so much to tell, I can't remember it. If Ruth were here she would help. Send for Ruth—please send for her."

"Ruth has told me some things, my love; she is gone home."

"But about Florence—that was it—Florence and Justine. Justine is dead, they said—is she dead? My head aches so very much." Alice sank half exhausted upon her pillow.

"You must sleep again, my love," began Lady Catharine; but Alice roused herself instantly.

"Sleep!—never. I must tell."

"No, indeed, my child, you must not tell. Whatever the wrong may be it is forgiven."

"Forgiven! before you have heard?"

"All—everything. But I have heard much already. Oh, Alice! my precious child! may you but

find the same forgiveness with God," and Lady Catharine sank upon her knees in an agony of grief.

"I should like you to pray for me," whispered Alice.

Lady Catharine recovered her self-command almost instantaneously. Her voice never faltered as she read the prayer for pardon in the Visitation of the Sick, and when she rose up the expression of her face was not only peaceful but thankful. Alice, too, seemed comforted. She pointed to a chair for Lady Catharine to sit down, and said,

"You are quite sure that you forgive?"

"Yes, indeed, my love. Do not think of me; think only of yourself."

"But I have been wrong," continued Alice, "such a long time—always."

"And I have loved you so long," said Lady Catharine.

"Yes, because of dear mamma, not for myself—but I would do everything, and I would love you dearly," and she tried to raise herself in her bed and throw her arms round Lady Catharine's neck.

"For your mother's sake I loved you first, my own Alice," said Lady Catharine; "but since for yourself."

"No, not for me—not for me," pursued Alice; "but I would do better. Would it be wrong to pray?" she added in an eager, tremulous voice.

"Pray for what?"

"That I might get well only for one week—that I might do every little tiny thing to please you, and then I would come back and die."

Lady Catharine could not answer.

"I must die, I know," continued Alice. "If I were forgiven, I should like it—not to do wrong any more."

"My love, we must not doubt of forgiveness when we are really sorry."

"Yes, I know ; but I have been so often sorry, and I have gone wrong again. Yet now I think I am in earnest ; I think He knows it."

"Doubtless God knows it and accepts it," said Lady Catharine. "Alice, we shall yet part in peace."

"When I die," said Alice, and she slightly shuddered. "Will it be very soon?" she added, in a tone of deep awe.

"Very soon, it may be ; and we must think it cannot be too soon if it is God's will."

"And if I am forgiven," said Alice ; "if I am quite sure of that ; would Mr. Clifford say he was sure?"

"We must trust to the word of God, my love. 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.' That is what St. John says ; and again, St. Paul tells us, that 'This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.'"

"I wish Mr. Clifford was here ; I wish he could say it to me," continued Alice. "He thought me so wicked, would he believe now that I am sorry?"

"Yes, indeed ; how could he doubt it?"

"But, will you tell him ? Perhaps I shall be —" she stopped ; "if it is very soon, you know, he might not be here ; but I should like him to be told. I loved him very much when he talked that night. And Mrs. Clifford, and Madeline, and Ruth, will they come and see me ? I should like to say good-bye, if I must—are you sure?—must I really die?"

Alice's terror seemed returning, and Lady Catharine, controlling her own anguish, kissed her again and again, and raising her gently, gave her water to moisten her parched lips. Distressing memories seemed crowding upon Alice's mind.

"There is so much," she murmured, "it comes

all together ; so long ago it happened. At the White House I deceived mamma ; one day I told a story : Benson let me do wrong things ; I can't recollect—won't you help me ?” and her glassy eyes were raised entreatingly and helplessly to Lady Catharine.

“You are too weak to remember all, my dear child ; but your Saviour is most merciful ; He will never turn away. He loves you very dearly.”

“I have been wicked,—worse than any one,” said Alice.

“Yet all the time think how He loved you. When you were left an orphan, how He took care of you ; and how He has blessed you ever since, though you were wilful and careless ; and now, oh, Alice ! there is no blessing like repentance, for it will bring you to rest in Paradise.”

“Rest,” repeated Alice, very faintly. Lady Catharine, as she bent down, caught the words, “My mother.”

“Yes, Alice, my precious child, rest with her ; with the spirits of the pure like her ; rest in the company of angels ; rest, above all, with God.”

And as the last words were uttered, Alice's head sank upon the pillow and her eyes closed, whether in sleep or the torpor of approaching death, Lady Catharine could not tell.

CHAPTER XXXV.

WHEN Ruth left Alice she went back to the Parsonage, to shut herself up in her own room. Alice's parting words were the one overflowing drop in her cup of bitterness:—"She wanted me to think about being confirmed, and I could not—that was the reason."

And this was the end of all her efforts to obtain influence! Florence encouraged in a course of deception; Agnes De Lacy confided to the teaching of one who could only lead her astray; Justine's evil schemes furthered till they were terminated suddenly and awfully; and Alice, her companion, her friend, who from childhood had looked up to her and loved her, kept back from the solemn ordinances of the Church, and about, it might be, to enter upon the last struggle of life and death, with a burdened conscience, and unsupported by the chief blessing which God has provided for His people. Ruth might well tremble when she thought of these things. Her own share in them was indeed exaggerated considerably by the agitation of the moment. Florence would have been frivolous and obstinate, Justine deceitful, and Alice unstable, whether Ruth had concerned herself with them or not; but the part which she had taken, though unconsciously, in fostering the original evil in their characters, could not be hidden.

Ruth was not wilfully insincere. One wrong principle had blinded her; but she was still bent upon serving God truly. The startling consequences of her errors forced her to a closer self-examination, and

something of the truth began to dawn upon her. The deceit practised towards her mother had frightened her at first; but she had stifled self-reproach, and passed it over, if not forgotten it. Now it came again. One glaring offence will often, as if by a special permission of Providence, open our eyes to many secret ones. Ruth now reviewed her conduct step by step. At one moment she was inclined to excuse herself, and especially to compare herself with Madeline, and ask whether her sister, under similar temptations, would not have acted in the same way. But a sincere purpose must, by God's blessing, enlighten by degrees both the conscience and the judgment; and Ruth soon acknowledged that Madeline had in fact been placed under precisely the same circumstances as herself at the beginning, but that an act of strict adherence to duty—an act which many might have termed scrupulousness—had kept her from every succeeding difficulty. If Madeline had entered Mrs. De Lacy's house instead of carefully consulting what she believed to be her mother's wishes, she might have been involved in the same snare as Ruth. We excuse our faults because of the strength of our temptation, and forget that we have brought the temptation upon ourselves. The Bible tells us that God never tempts us above that we are able to bear.

All this and much more Ruth saw, and bitter indeed was her sorrow. Conversation with her mother was her only comfort. Mrs. Clifford did not so much try to subdue her anguish by reasoning, as to soften it by sympathy. She encouraged her to repeat again all the minute events of the last few weeks, not by way of confession but relief. She could understand, she said, how easily Ruth might have been led on, without any deliberate intention of doing wrong—acting upon expediency instead of principle;

for it was the frequent mistake of many older and wiser persons ; and as Ruth listened to her mother, and her heavy heart grew lighter, she was not less penitent for her faults, or less sorrowful about Alice, but she was freed from the lonely feeling which oppresses us when first we are conscious of having fallen into serious errors ; and her perception of right and wrong became clearer and deeper. When we exaggerate our faults we are not always truly humble. At the root of the most intense outward expression of sorrow there is often a belief that we are not quite as bad as we say, and an idea, unacknowledged, that our grief is in some measure an expiation for our offence. Truth is as valuable in repentance as in all other cases ; for, though our feelings may be less keen, they will certainly be more lasting when they are just as well as sincere.

Mr. Clifford returned home the day but one after Alice became so much worse. The accounts from the Manor were then rather more favourable. The dangerous symptoms had not increased much, to the surprise of Alice's medical attendant ; though as yet little real hope could be given. Alice required sleep, but it was bestowed only at short intervals, and quietness being deemed indispensable, no one was allowed to see her except Lady Catharine.

Ruth became extremely anxious, almost more so now that there was hope, than when there had appeared to be none. She would willingly have been backwards and forwards between the Parsonage and the Manor all day, and Mr. Clifford found it scarcely possible to calm her uneasiness. Her exaggerated views of her own conduct revived, and because Alice had met with an accident at the pic-nic, to which she had persuaded her to go, she almost began to fancy that she was the cause of her present illness.

Mr. Clifford tried to engage her attention by talk-

ing with her upon all that had occurred. Ruth could speak and think of nothing else. Sometimes it seemed quite plain to her when and how she had failed in her duty ; at other times she was confirmed in the belief that she had never intended to do wrong, and, on the contrary, had generally set herself to do good. How could evil consequences follow upon good intentions ?

Ruth's ideas were made clearer upon this point when she sat with her father and mother the same evening in the arbour, at the extremity of the green walk, where in long past years—the years of her happy innocent childhood, she had gained some of her first notions of religious truth. She had by that time told all ; and not only all that she had done, but all that she had wished to do : all her motives and feelings, so far as she could discover them. “I cannot find out,” she said, “how I managed to be so mistaken. I can see that I was, but I fancied myself right at the time. I hope I did not do it all wilfully.”

“We are apt to deceive ourselves a little upon such subjects, my dear Ruth,” replied Mr. Clifford. “Wilful sins are not merely those which we deliberately plan, but they are also those which we encourage day by day in the temper of our minds. A man is secretly ambitious ; to gratify his ambition he commits an injustice, without perceiving that it is an injustice. Then he opens his eyes and says, ‘I am not guilty, because I did not mean to be unjust.’ Granted ; he is not guilty of wilful injustice, but he is guilty of wilful ambition. It is the same with selfishness, vanity—all sins, in fact. Any one false principle allowed to take root, and then acted upon, is a wilful offence.”

The tears rose to Ruth's eyes.

“Poor child !” said Mrs. Clifford, “she is very unhappy ; we must not be hard upon her.”

"Ruth knows I would not for the world be hard upon her, or upon any one," replied Mr. Clifford. "It is because there is too much in one's own heart of the same self-deception that one is apt to speak strongly against it. I have seen it fatally marring what might otherwise have been most superior characters; a secret, gentle selfishness, or vanity, or love of self-indulgence; or, as it is in Ruth's case—Ruth, my child, you will not be vexed with your father and mother for reminding you of a disposition which they saw before you really began to discriminate right from wrong—a desire to be first, to rule and govern other minds; I have seen these little faults—or, as they are often called, foibles, eating away the seeds of even exalted virtues, and involving others in suffering for years, and yet the individuals themselves, firm in good intentions, and professing to act from high, even religious motives—"

"Oh! papa!" exclaimed Ruth, and she looked at him with surprise amounting to alarm.

"It is a very stern doctrine," said Mr. Clifford, "but I am afraid it may be a true one; and if we consider a little more closely we shall see that the principle is fully carried out in the Bible. Saul was secretly irreverent and wilful. He was told utterly to destroy Amalek; the people took of the spoils, the sheep and oxen, not for their own pleasure, but for the service of God. Saul permitted it; he did not see that the act was disobedience. The answer of Samuel to his excuse is a warning to us all, when we are inclined to deviate from the strict line of right with what seems to ourselves a good intention: 'Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.'"

"But, papa," said Ruth, "if we do not see that we are wrong how can we be responsible?"

"Because, my dear child, we ought to see it. We

have a perfect example and a perfect law given us in the Bible, and we may follow it if we will. It is no excuse for a drunkard, who never reads his Bible, to say that he does not know that drunkenness is a crime."

"But such a sin as that is what every one perceives to be wicked at once," observed Ruth.

"True; and it requires careful self-examination to detect sins of the heart—pride, vanity, selfishness, self-indulgence. Still, where is our excuse? Are we not told to examine ourselves?—to watch and pray lest we enter into temptation?"

"But—I do not mean to be perverse; mamma, you know that I do not," began Ruth, turning to her mother—

"Your papa will not think so, dear child; only let us know what your difficulty is."

"I have been wrong," continued Ruth, colouring deeply; "I have deceived—almost I have said what was not true. Papa, I would own it again and again; but it was not vanity which made me do it, nor selfishness; and I do not think exactly that it was pride. I used to examine myself; I really tried to prepare for confirmation; I should have been miserable to have neglected my prayers; or not to have read the Bible, and I was always wishing to get out of my perplexities, if I could have seen the right way."

"That is, if you could have made up your mind to give up your desire of influence," said Mr. Clifford.

"Yes, it might be; perhaps it was so," said Ruth considering; "but it was influence for good which I wished for."

"But influence is not in itself a legitimate object of desire, Ruth; there lies the error. Many weeks ago I warned you that it was not,"

Ruth looked as if she could not agree, but did not like to differ.

"The love of influence is ambition," continued Mr. Clifford; "it is the love of power, and power we are expressly told 'belongeth unto God.'"

"But to do good, to make others good," said Ruth; surely we are bound to attempt it."

"To do right, certainly; to make others good, certainly not; and for one very evident reason—that it is a task entirely beyond us."

Ruth repeated to herself, "Not to make others good," whilst pondering what the words could possibly mean.

"To try to act ourselves upon the minds of our fellow-creatures," continued Mr. Clifford, "instead of simply doing what we are told, and trusting the effect to God, is as if Moses, when commanded to strike the rock in the desert, had begun to dig wells, and cut channels, hoping to bring water for the people by human skill. It is undertaking to do ourselves what God alone can do. The power to change the heart is His and His only.

"Yes," replied Ruth, "of course; but God does give us power over each other."

"Undoubtedly; that is, He vouchsafes to make use of us as instruments. But let us turn again to the Bible. Do you remember what the apostle says? 'God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty: that no flesh should glory in His presence.' The mighty things of the world are talents, eloquence, a determined will, powers of persuasion, rank, riches, beauty, grace of manner; and the weak things of the world are meekness, charity, patience, long-suffering, self-denial. These we may desire as we will; we cannot strive for them too energetically;

the others are glittering temptations, and in themselves powerless for good."

"Ruth cannot quite go with you," said Mrs. Clifford; "she does not see why the two are not compatible; why, for instance, a person may not be very clever, or very rich, and at the same time extremely good, and therefore blest with more extended means of influence; and why, therefore, it is not allowable to wish for talents or riches."

"Because talents and riches are great snares," replied Mr. Clifford; and the very fact of desiring them shews that there is danger in our having them. Do you not see that if we could believe, what is really the case, that all power and all influence belong to God; and if we really desired the good of our fellow-creatures, and not the gratification of our own pride, we should be quite contented whether we had influence apparently (for all persons may have it really) or not? It is God who is working, not we. If He does not choose us as His instruments, it will make no difference; the good will be effected by some one, and as long as it is effected we must be satisfied."

"Still," said Ruth, "it would be delightful to feel that one had been the means of doing great good. It has been one of my dreams from a child."

"Then, my dearest Ruth, you may be assured that it is your peculiar temptation."

"But no great deeds would be effected if people had not such dreams and longings," replied Ruth.

"I grant it perfectly, and I do not say that they may not be turned to very great advantage; they may rouse energy and encourage perseverance; but I do say, and I would repeat it most strongly, that they must always be a serious temptation. For remember, every good principle, carried to excess, becomes evil, and the higher the principle the more fatal when perverted."

"But would such dreams be more dangerous than others?" asked Ruth.

"Yes, because the evil is infinitely more subtle. Remember, Ruth, we have seen that power,—all power,—most especially influence over the mind, is the work of the Spirit of God. A clever man talks, or writes, or preaches, and persons come to him, and say, How happy you must be! What infinite good you are effecting! No one thinks it right to remind him that the good is not his own. By degrees he begins to believe what he is so constantly told,—he works even more diligently, but, unconsciously to himself, from a different motive. Still the same words are sounded in his ears. At length he dies; people lament him, and recount all the good he has done; he has left a name for posterity to honour. But he is dead; 'after death comes the judgment.' When that man is called to give an account of himself before God, do you think he will be accepted because he was eloquent, energetic, liberal in giving money and apt to advise, or even the instrument of turning many from sin to holiness?"

"One would almost imagine so," said Ruth; "that is, one cannot help fancying that such things must make a difference."

"Think of St. Paul," said Mr. Clifford, "where he says, 'Lest having preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away.' It must be a fearful thing for such a man as I have been describing, for any person indeed who has trusted to the good which he appears to have effected, to discover, when repentance can be of no avail, that he has been all the time acting the part of Herod, who listened to the voice of the people proclaiming him a god, and perished miserably, because he gave not the True God the glory."

"But the danger is not certain," said Ruth.

"No, there is one hope of escape, and but one.

When the traveller in the desert knows that the scorching Simoom is approaching, he throws himself upon the ground, and buries his face in the dust, and it passes, and leaves him uninjured ; and when the scorching Simoom of human admiration is about to assail us, our safety must be the same—to lie prostrate before God, closing our eyes, and stopping our ears, and uttering a confession of unworthiness to Him, for every word of praise from man. Is this the temper of mind which suits with the desire of influence ?”

Finding that Ruth was silent, Mr. Clifford continued :—

“ I will tell you, my dear Ruth,” he said, “ what our actual position when we appear to be doing good is like. Last year we saw the enormous steam printing press, by which Bibles can be printed at the rate of one in a minute. Do you remember noticing the boy who placed the blank sheet of paper in readiness for the engine to work upon ?”

“ Yes,” replied Ruth, “ perfectly.”

“ Now if that boy had failed in his business, the work would have been stopped. But was it he who printed the Bible ?”

Ruth smiled.

“ The mighty power, if one may use a simile upon such a subject without irreverence,” continued Mr. Clifford, “ was totally independent of him. The sheet of paper went in blank ; it came out a message of mercy to millions. Suppose, that instead of simply attending to his duty, the boy had endeavoured himself to print the page ?”

“ He would have been crushed,” replied Ruth.

“ And so shall we be crushed, my dear Ruth ;—crushed in our happiness upon earth, and crushed in our hopes of Heaven, if we turn aside from the only true means of influence, fervent intercession, and a

strict obedience to humble daily duties, and seek to make others good, instead of carefully striving to be good ourselves."

Ruth put her hand within her father's, and said, whilst her lip quivered, and her eyes glistened :

"Papa, I think you are right ; if I had thought so before, Alice—" She stopped.

"My love, you will remember one way of doing good,—the chief way, if we would but believe it, is open to us always. Alice is in the hands of a most merciful God ; we may pray for her."

Madeline seems to have been long forgotten. There are many like her in this world—passing unnoticed by man, yet very precious in the sight of God.

At the end of the little passage into which the few bed-chambers of the Parsonage opened, there was a very small room—dark, without a fire-place, and long used as a lumber closet. It had no attraction of any kind. The lattice window faced a wall, and only when looking in one direction, could a distant peep of the hills be discovered, which closed round the village of Laneton. Madeline had chosen this closet for her own ; it had a charm for her. Perhaps it was the charm of independence and solitude ; perhaps there was something in by-gone associations—the remembrance of that first prayer, the germ of unfading happiness, which had been offered in the midst of the turmoil and distraction of school, in the little dressing-room at Mrs. Carter's house. The closet was known by the name of Madeline's hiding-place ; and many were the laughs raised at her expense, for the ingenuity with which she had managed to pile up boxes, and chests, and stow away all the useless treasures of many years, and still leave room for a habitation or, as Ruth called it, a settlement for herself. A little round table, and an old chair ; a shelf to hold about half-a-dozen books ; and the ledge

of the window for any *et ceteras*; these were all Madeline's accommodations for comfort. And they were all she needed. The half-hours spent in her hiding-place were seasons when earthly luxuries were forgotten;—they were half-hours of that peace which the world can neither give nor take away.

Madeline was in her closet now; the lattice window was open, and she was seated by it. Her face bore the traces of tears, for she was looking upon the sky and thinking of Alice. Before many days—possibly before many hours had gone by, the secrets of that invisible world, upon the outskirts of which she was gazing, might be revealed to her. What were those secrets? What would that state be upon which the friend with whom she had lived, played, talked, eaten and drank, and shared both sorrow and joy, would then enter? Where lay the home of the departed? What were their hopes and fears? What formed their happiness or their misery? And how could Alice bear the change? To go alone! unaided by human love; to begin a new existence, and that existence fixed—most blessed or most wretched for ever. Madeline trembled and grew pale. Another thought, a more terrible one, followed—a remembrance of Justine. Madeline's last recollection of her was the sound of her voice in the hall of Mrs. Carter's house on the morning of the discovery of her fault. It was the last that she had seen or heard of her. How little she imagined then, that it would be the last! How little she realized the possibility that they might never meet again until the fate of each should be decided for eternity! It seemed as if she herself had been brought nearer to death—nearer to judgment. The vast sky grew awful in its immensity; the radiance of the declining sun, sinking slowly behind the hill, became overpowering as the symbol of that eternal light, from which no secrets

of the heart can be hid. Justine! where was she? Madeline could bear the thought no longer, and she sank upon her knees in prayer.

There is peace to be found in repentance after grievous sin; in the turning of the heart to God amidst the harassing cares of middle life; in the self-dedication of the eleventh hour; but there is no peace promised, and none bestowed, so perfect, so holy, so deep and unspeakable, as the peace vouchsafed to such as "remember their Creator in the days of their youth." It was the blessing now granted to Madeline in her hour of darkness and trial.

Justine was gone beyond the reach of example, or warning, or prayer. That was a thought without comfort, save in the sympathy of Him who wept over Jerusalem, because it knew not the "time of its visitation." Alice was in danger, but Madeline could give vent to her anxious affection in earnest supplication; and trust that if the petition for life should not be granted, it would be denied only to be bestowed more fully in heaven.

Ruth had erred and Madeline was disappointed; but the love which was the real source of every joy, and the perfection which satisfied all her wishes, could never fail—could never change; the very thought of it was rest.

Yet more,—the prospect of death was awful, and the idea of venturing an unknown existence appalling. But more than fifteen years before, there had entered upon this lower world a little infant,—feeble, helpless,—the inheritor of sin and the child of wrath; it had no claim upon mercy, it had no right to look for happiness; it was born in the midst of suffering, exposed to ten thousand accidents of the body, liable to ten thousand evils of the soul; destruction and misery were its birthright. That little child was welcomed as a precious gift from heaven; friends were

waiting for it, angels were watching over it. It was tended with an unceasing love, guarded in its little cradle night and day, every want supplied, every pain soothed, every privation for its sake borne cheerfully and thankfully.

Since that hour a mighty change had passed over it; from the child of wrath it had been made the child of God; from the heir of shame, the inheritor of Heaven. And from the time of that change it had grown in grace as it grew in years. It had become more gentle, more humble, more trusting, loving, and earnest; weak, indeed, still;—bearing the taint of its first nature,—but conscious even to itself of desires which could never by nature be its own, and a love which could find a resting-place only in the bosom of its Saviour.

When the immortal spirit of that child, freed from the body of sin, should enter upon the shadowy world lying between earth and heaven, could it have cause to fear? Would the love which had been so provident for its support when it was the heir of evil, be less careful for its happiness when it was the destined inhabitant of glory?

Madeline could no longer doubt. Whilst she thought of the mercy which had already been vouchsafed to her, and told her fears and griefs in the ear of Him who loved her so truly, the heaviness of her heart changed into calm rest, and her forebodings for the future into cheerful hope.

“Thou shalt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee.”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

It is at times appointed in the providence of God that we should be brought face to face with some severe trial, forced to contemplate its every feature, taught to bend ourselves in submission to endure it; and at length when, after a long struggle, we are enabled to pray from our hearts that "God's will may be done," suddenly and unexpectedly comes relief.

Perhaps among the many seasons of refreshment granted us in the course of our earthly pilgrimage, there are none more perfect in enjoyment than these; foretastes, as they assuredly are, of the unspeakable rest which awaits us, when "our warfare shall be accomplished, and our iniquity pardoned," and in the Paradise of the blest we shall be preparing to receive at the Lord's hand "double for all our sins."

Peace of conscience is then added to the escape from suffering; and such was the happiness enjoyed by Lady Catharine Hyde, when, after two more days of alternate hope and fear, Alice was pronounced to be out of danger. The relief which she felt shewed her for the first time all she had endured whilst believing herself not only resigned, but unutterably thankful for the softened tone of Alice's mind.

Alice was nursed now with even more devoted tenderness than before, and a tenderness which brought a full reward both to herself and Lady Catharine. The sense of having her love appreciated was all that Lady Catharine required, to bring out the feelings which sorrow and natural reserve had long chilled. And Alice began to understand what had before often

perplexed her—her mother's extreme affection for Lady Catharine. The difference between the kindness shewn her after her accident, and that which she experienced now, was most striking. Before, everything had been provided for her with a restrained, melancholy care, with what appeared to be the sadness of "thoughts which do often lie too deep for tears." It was an unapproachable affection; so sensitive that it shrank from the least touch, and was disturbed by every passing shadow. Whether Alice smiled or sighed, whether she read or worked, whether she spoke abruptly or leisurely, were differences then always marked, and very frequently commented upon; and when commented upon, of course increasing restraint, and so augmenting the evil. The love that seeks and is doubtful of return, is a jealous, anxious, wearying spirit preying upon itself. The love that knows itself beloved, is open, cheerful, confiding, and hardy enough to bend to the storms and rebuffs of daily life, and spring up in vigour when they have passed. Alice was not sufficiently accustomed to examine the workings of her mind, to comprehend from whence the change arose, though she felt it hourly.

Yet the belief in mutual affection would not alone have sufficed to work the change for her happiness. It is very good for us all occasionally to have our habits broken in upon, and to be obliged to look upon life under a new aspect. It prevents our ideas from corroding, we become more alive to the feelings of others, and see ourselves and them in a more true light. Sudden events are much more useful in effecting this change than any reasoning.

The illness, which had completely interrupted Lady Catharine's ordinary train of thought, proved more efficacious than even Mr. Clifford's words, in teaching her how Alice was to be treated. When she

could no longer direct her every action, and find fault with her for breaking rules, she lost in a degree the desire of doing so. Alice was often left to herself, in order to be quiet; then she began to find her own ways of amusement, and Lady Catharine was too glad to see her contented, to enquire particularly what she had been doing. Alice liked the feeling of independence more a great deal than she cared for the practice; and when she discovered that she might choose her own work, and read or write as it suited her, and employ her day very much as she fancied, she was pleased rather than not to exercise a little self-discipline, by conforming to what she knew was Lady Catharine's wish. It is not agreeable, whatever we may sometimes think, to be able to do always exactly as we like; and when persons are set free from restraint, they either form a new rule for themselves, or become restless and unhappy. True liberty is to be found in the spirit which wills what it must and ought to do; even as the most complete happiness is that service of God which is "perfect freedom."

But above and beyond all, the change which was now beginning to brighten Alice's life was to be found in her own heart. This was the real good, the blessing which would have supported her, even if outward circumstances had continued as untoward as before. Not that her natural disposition was altered, and that she had suddenly overcome the desire to follow her own way; or that she was not often impatient and fretful; still oftener weary when reading the Bible, and distracted when praying. Alice was Alice still. But the struggle was begun; it was no longer the inconstant effort of a heart clinging to this world, whilst feebly desiring heaven, but the steady determination that, cost what it might,—be the labour of conquering her natural faults ever so arduous,—she would devote herself to it in faith, and be, through

God's assistance, His child in devoted obedience, as she was by the privileges of her baptism. Alice had gazed upon death, and she could not forget it. She had looked into Eternity, believing herself about to enter it, and she knew that the same Eternity still lay before her. She was blessed in her resolution, and yet, more blessed are they who require no such shock to startle them into consistency.

The steady, simple piety of Madeline Clifford was surely more valuable in the sight even of men, than the sincere, but irregular, unequal efforts of Alice. Alice herself felt Madeline's superiority; and Ruth now acknowledged it also,—few could have guessed how heartily. Ruth was a person to give but few external signs of feeling; or, at least, of those feelings which are peculiarly our own, those which lie open but to the eye of God. All with her now was quiet, orderly, and silent: there perhaps lay the great alteration. Ruth said much less than she had been wont to do; she was not, as before, the first to offer an opinion, or to suggest plans. What was proposed she followed out diligently, whether it was a walk, or an extra attendance at the school, or any little scheme for the day; but she had no schemes of her own. Madeline often found her partly dressed and reading, when she awoke early in the morning; and instead of working in the garden in the evening, Ruth was generally known to be sitting by herself, through the moonlight, and even in darkness, till summoned to tea. When Alice and Ruth were together there was not much conversation between them. Ruth generally preferred reading aloud. It was from Madeline that Alice learnt the news which interested her, for it was from her that she heard of Mrs. De Lacy, and Florence, and Agnes; that Florence had returned home according to a wish of her own, finding no pleasure in travelling after the shock she had received; and that Mrs. De Lacy had

given up all idea of engaging a foreign governess, and had joined some friends who were going to Switzerland for a short time. These subjects were extremely painful to Ruth, most especially, as besides reminding her of her own faults, they had brought pain and annoyance to her mother. Letters had passed between Mrs. Clifford and Mrs. De Lacy, explanatory of Ruth's share in the deception practised; and Ruth had read these letters, and watched the expression of her mother's face when she had to answer them, and she knew that it was shame for her which made her mamma so uneasy at the sight of the foreign postmark and paper. All this was very humbling; and in those hours of solitude Ruth thought deeply upon the conduct which had caused it; her mistakes of principle, her false judgment, her hidden pride. Solemn duties lay before her; solemn vows were to be renewed; a most holy privilege was soon to be vouchsafed to her. And now, at last, the veil was drawn aside, and she saw herself in her true light; unequal to the duties, not fully realizing the vows, and unworthy,—oh! how miserably unworthy,—of the privilege. It was not strange that Ruth should be silent, and move with a quieter step, and sit engrossed in her own thoughts. Stillness and self-recollection were but the necessary accompaniments of that strict preparation which was required of one who had deceived herself and deceived others.

And stillness and self-recollection are essential for us all, but in different degrees. Madeline's laugh was heard at the Parsonage, thrilling as merrily as ever on the ear; Madeline's blue eyes glanced as brightly as before; her step was still bounding and free with health and happiness, and her sweet voice sounded as the clear whisper of a ministering spirit to the weary heart of Alice, when sometimes dispirited at a failure in a fresh endeavour to be good,

or, worn with the weakness of sickness, she lay exhausted on the sofa, too tired for reading and but little disposed for conversation. It was the voice of one who spoke of religion from the knowledge of its blessedness, and not the consciousness of its terrors.

"It will be so very, very nice, Alice, dear, by-and-by," she said one day, as she was sitting by the side of Alice's sofa, "when we can all go to church together again. There always seems a want now you are away, as if we were not a whole family."

"You ought not to feel it," said Alice, "because you must have been accustomed to it by this time. I have not been to church for a great many Sundays."

"But we are not accustomed to it," replied Madeline; "and we always think of you. Ruth and I made an agreement that we would remember you in the prayer for sick persons, till you could come to church yourself."

"One family," said Alice, in a musing tone. "No, Maddy, we shall not be that for a long time to come."

"Why not? What—" a sudden thought struck Madeline, and she paused.

"Next Wednesday is the Confirmation," said Alice, "and the Sunday after —"

Madeline's eyes were dimmed in an instant. "Oh, Alice!" she exclaimed; "I would give anything—yes anything in the world to have you with us there."

"So would I," said Alice, in a very low voice; adding directly, "so would I, at least, if I were fit."

"You might be wrapped up very carefully and taken in the carriage," said Madeline.

"I do not think Lady Catharine would consent," replied Alice. "And there is your papa, too; he has not said anything about it, and he cannot have a better opinion of me now than he had."

"But I will ask him," exclaimed Madeline eagerly, "I will go to him directly."

"No, Madeline; no, indeed: I will not have a word said. I could not bear him to refuse, and he cannot see any reason for it now more than there was before; and there is so little time left. No, I will wait."

"Wait!" said Madeline; "and perhaps be ill again."

"Yes, perhaps," answered Alice, despondingly, "but it cannot be helped, it has been all my own fault."

"But here is Ruth," said Madeline, as her sister appeared at the door; "just talk to her; ask her whether she does not think it possible."

"She cannot tell," replied Alice, "and she knows more about me than other people do; she knows I am not fit."

As Ruth drew near, her quick perception caught the meaning of the conversation in an instant. "Alice may not be well enough to go to the Confirmation," she said.

There was something of coldness in her manner, and Alice looked hurt, and observed, "I hoped, Ruth, you would have cared about it."

Ruth made no reply. She stooped to fasten the sandal of her shoe, and Madeline saw that she could not manage it well. She offered to do it for her; but Ruth would not be helped. She kept her head bent down, and when she raised it again, began to unfasten her bonnet strings in the same nervous manner. Alice lay back on the sofa, seemingly very tired. She was playing with a rose; but her eyes were fixed upon her hands, which bore the stamp of illness almost as much as her face.

"They will not grow strong, like mine, by next Wednesday, I am afraid," said Madeline, guessing what she was thinking.

"And it would be no good if they could," said Alice. "I had better not think about it."

Madeline was going to appeal to Ruth again for her opinion; but a glance shewed her that she had better not take any notice of her. "I shall go into the garden," she said, "and gather some more flowers for your stand; these are quite shabby."

Alice begged her to wait; but Madeline looked again at Ruth, and repeated her intention.

"There is a beautiful moss-rose in the middle walk," remarked Ruth, quietly, and Madeline took the hint and was gone directly. Then Ruth rose, and kneeling by Alice, said, in a husky voice, "Alice, I cannot be confirmed if you are not."

"Ruth, you!—not confirmed!" exclaimed Alice.

"No, Alice, I cannot; I must wait."

"But I thought you did not care. I am not well enough—they will not let me be," said Alice.

"They will let you. If they do not, I cannot go," said Ruth. "I could not bear it without you. Alice, I have been more wrong; I am much worse than you are; it was I who made you do things—I who encouraged it all. I could not go and for you to be shut out. Even if I were confirmed, I could not go to the service afterwards on Sunday. I have said so to papa."

"Have you?" exclaimed Alice, in surprise.

"Yes, and he understood. I spoke to him last night. I have thought and thought, until I could not bear thinking; and at last I went to him. He seemed to know what I felt; but he was not sure about you. He said the time was very short, and that you had not expressed any wish. He could not quite make out what you felt about it; and then he spoke of your not being well enough."

"Yes, there is the difficulty," said Alice.

"But it is not the real difficulty. I went to

mamma this morning and asked her, and she does not think there would be much risk. She is nearly sure that Lady Catharine would be persuaded. Oh, Alice! If I might only tell papa that you wish it!"

"To be confirmed? Yes—indeed, I wish it; but I don't know afterwards—I have not thought about it all as I ought; it frightens me."

"But, Alice, I am frightened, and I have more cause to be than you have. It seems now as if I should never know again when I was doing right. Yet papa will let me go. Say yes, for my sake."

"No, not for your sake," said Alice, quickly. "That must not be the reason."

"Then for your own sake; because it is right."

"Is it right?" asked Alice.

"Yes, I suppose it is—it must be. Alice, indeed, indeed I could not bear it if you were not there."

"One must be very good afterwards," said Alice.

Ruth was silent.

"Very much in earnest," continued Alice.

Still Ruth kept her hands clasped together, and remained without speaking till Madeline came back with the flowers. Ruth looked round and beckoned to her. "Tell her she must be confirmed," she said, laying her hand upon Alice's, and looking entreatingly at Madeline.

"Not confirmed only," said Alice. "I could bear that; but afterwards."

Madeline kissed her, and whispered, "It is like going to a Father and a Brother; one ought not to be so very much afraid."

"You did not think so once," said Alice; "you were frightened as I am."

"I am frightened now," replied Madeline; "that is—no, not frightened, it is not the word—I was frightened at first, when I talked to papa; now it is

different. It makes my heart beat; but I think of being loved, and then I am happy."

"Hark! that is papa's voice," I am sure, exclaimed Ruth, rising.

Mr. Clifford was enquiring of Marsham if he might see Alice.

"He is come to talk to me," exclaimed Alice, becoming much agitated.

"He said he would," replied Ruth. "Alice, pray listen to him."

"But if I am not well enough—if I cannot go?"

"Papa came to the Manor with me," said Ruth; "but I was not to tell you. He came with mamma, too, to talk to Lady Catharine. If she said the Confirmation was impossible, they were to have gone home without seeing you again; so it must be settled that you may go if you will."

Ruth took up her bonnet and went to the door.

Madeline remained behind. "You do wish it?" she said.

Alice did not say "Yes;" but she kept Madeline's hand fast in hers. "Maddy, dear, I think sometimes that if you were to say some prayers for me, I should be better. Do you think you could?"

"I do very often," said Madeline, eagerly.

"But now, particularly, would you ask that I might have the same things you want yourself—that I might be fit? I should like some one else to ask besides myself. You won't forget?"

Madeline's promise was understood by manner rather than by words. She made Alice drink some water, smoothed her pillows, and went out of the room, just as Mr. Clifford entered it.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MR. CLIFFORD had held several conversations with Alice since she left her sick chamber; but they had been general. Alice was not cold, but she was still reserved; she could listen, but she could not talk. She listened now. The first beginnings of a conversation upon any particular subject are almost always awkward. Mr. Clifford said he had been talking to Lady Catharine; but no notice was taken of the observation. He remarked that Alice was looking better, and she said that she felt better. Then he enquired if she had been out, and was informed that she was to go into the garden that afternoon; and whilst this was said, Alice diligently destroyed the last remnant of the rose which she had before been pulling to pieces. Mr. Clifford made one or two more attempts to draw her out, and finding them unsuccessful, said at length,

"One would imagine, Alice, that you and I were strangers, instead of old friends. I wonder what we are both thinking of."

Alice only blushed.

"I will not try to guess your thoughts," he continued; "though I should like you to guess mine."

Alice looked up rather archly; but in an instant she became quite grave, and said she believed she knew them.

"Ruth has been with you," observed Mr. Clifford; "perhaps she has given you some idea?"

"She spoke of the Confirmation," said Alice, shortly.

"I imagined she had done so. She is very anxious about it; so am I; so is Lady Catharine."

"Lady Catharine!" repeated Alice, in a tone of surprise.

"Yes, she is anxious in two ways; both that you should go and that you should not."

"I thought she was afraid," said Alice.

"Yes, so she is in a degree; but I think we could overcome her fear if—" He paused.

Alice also was silent.

"A good deal has passed since you and I had a conversation upon the subject on the shore," pursued Mr. Clifford. "Do you remember it well?"

"Yes, perfectly," replied Alice; but she would add nothing besides.

Mr. Clifford looked vexed. "I had hoped your wishes were altered," he continued; "if they are not, there is very little to be said at present; but you must promise me, my dear child, to let me talk to you more fully before long. I think you will see the duty and necessity of taking advantage of the next early opportunity, if not of this one." He rose as if to go.

Alice stopped him. "Please don't," she said, whilst her voice faltered. "I think—I wish—I would much rather you should not go."

Mr. Clifford sat down again instantly.

"I could be confirmed," exclaimed Alice, hurriedly; "I should like it; but I could not—I am not good enough for the Holy Communion; and therefore I would rather wait entirely. I hope you understand, and will not be angry," she added beseechingly.

Mr. Clifford answered in a tone of great kindness. "Thank you, my love: I like to hear your difficulties. No one could be angry with you; and you

know you are one of my own children. I can quite understand —”

“And agree?” exclaimed Alice.

“Not entirely that; but I think we shall agree after we have talked together a little. I am sure, Alice, now you are in earnest.”

“I hope so,” said Alice, humbly.

“I am sure you are,” repeated Mr. Clifford. “I am certain that you would like to please God.”

“Yes, very much,” replied Alice.

“Well, then, dear child, why should you wish not to do the one thing which He has especially commanded?”

“Because it is so serious—so awful,” answered Alice.

“Doubtless; no one can really tell how much so; but it is just as serious and awful for me as for you.”

“Only you are so much better,” said Alice.

“That is not the question. The blessing in itself is infinite, and the duty most solemn; but it is commanded; this is all we have to think of.”

“We must be fit,” said Alice.

“How fit—in what degree?”

Alice did not know what to reply.

“Not perfect,” said Mr. Clifford; because in that case no human being would ever be fit. Then how good must we be? how many virtues must we possess, before we are permitted to receive the Holy Communion?”

“We must wish to have them all,” replied Alice.

“And do you not wish it? Is there any one wrong practice which you are determined to encourage?”

“No, I hope not—I will try not,” said Alice.

“Yet you are still afraid?”

"Because I am not sure of being good afterwards," replied Alice. "I cannot trust myself."

"Neither can I, my love; nor can Lady Catharine; nor Madeline; nor any person that ever lived. But the Bible tells us that however weak we may be in ourselves, yet in our Saviour we are strong. Only, Alice, our trust must be shown by actions. It can be of no use to go to a physician and say, we will do what he bids us in every case except the one which he assures us is of the greatest importance."

"But wicked people are kept from the Holy Communion," said Alice; "and every one says it is very dangerous to go, if we are wicked."

"Unquestionably. But, Alice, you are not afraid to be confirmed; you do not refuse to go before God, and promise to keep the vows of your baptism."

"Because I mean to try and do it," said Alice.

"Then you are not wicked; that is, not wilfully determined to do wrong. There is therefore no obstacle of that kind."

"I only wish to be sure that I shall not go back again," said Alice. "But all my life I have begun things and never finished them."

"The certainty is in your own power much more than you think," answered Mr. Clifford. "If you remember, when we talked together upon the shore, I spoke to you a great deal about your duties; but I did not tell you how you could perform them. My wish was, I own, rather to alarm you, by shewing you how many and difficult they were. I hoped by that means to rouse your fears and your energies. Now that you really feel how impossible it is to fulfil them of yourself, I should like to consider what is to be done in such a case."

"We must pray, I know," said Alice.

"Yes, pray diligently —just mark the word—it is

a very peculiar one to use on such a subject ; we should rather have said, I think, earnestly or fervently. The church says *diligently*—so also our blessed Lord declares, ‘That men ought always to pray and not to faint.’ ”

“That never struck me before,” said Alice.

“Very likely not. We are often enthusiastic and excited when we give directions to others. Our Lord on the contrary is simple, clear, and, if one may be allowed to use the word without irreverence, practical. His own prayer—what can be more quiet and yet more solemn than it is ?”

“It is very beautiful,” said Alice ; “but I very often think that I do not understand it.”

“We must be perfect to do that, because it is a perfect prayer. If we never were to use any other, we could still put a meaning into those words to express all our wants.”

“But we must use others,” said Alice.

“Yes ; from the infirmity of our nature we require change to keep up our wandering attention. Still the Lord’s Prayer is our model ; and one great peculiarity which must strike us when we think about it, is its being so short and so calm.”

“I thought people were better the longer they prayed,” said Alice.

“To like our prayers, and to find a great deal to pray for, is a sign of our advancement in goodness, no doubt,” replied Mr. Clifford ; “but if we are beginners in religion, we must take the instruction of beginners. Our Lord gave His disciples a prayer in few words. He Himself continued all night in prayer to God.”

“Then you would not have me use long prayers ?” said Alice.

“Short prayers, but frequent, my love, would be my recommendation. And this was what I wished

particularly to speak to you about when you told me just now that you could not trust yourself, and that you could not be sure of going on rightly. You are, I allow, naturally very changeable; your moods vary almost every hour in the day. Now if you can bring yourself to obey a fixed rule, quite independent of your other moods—a rule for your prayers—I think it will go far towards giving you stability of character.”

“I know I must pray every morning and evening,” said Alice.

“Yes, but that is not enough. Stated prayers in the day, at stated hours, are essential for a person of your character.”

“But I am often engaged,” said Alice, “and I can never answer for interruptions.”

“I am aware of that; but I am sure also that nothing is ever accomplished either in religion or in common business, unless we put before ourselves some paramount object to which everything else is to yield. If keeping to your fixed times of prayer is your object, you will attain it even if you are called upon to live amidst the bustle of a London life, instead of in a retired country place.”

“But what hours?—how can I manage? I shall never know how to begin,” said Alice.

“There is a rule which has been practised at different times in the Christian Church as to hours of prayer,” replied Mr. Clifford; “and it is better to keep to example than to form plans of our own. I will give you a little book of Bishop Cosins’, framed for the Protestant ladies who were in exile at the court of Charles the Second, when he was in France. It has, amongst many others, prayers for the morning, evening, and for the third, sixth, and ninth hours, which are memorable as connected with our Lord’s sufferings.”

“But I could not use them all,” said Alice.

"No, and I would not advise you to attempt it; at least at first. Perhaps you might find time twice in the day; we will say at the sixth hour, which is twelve o'clock, and in the evening, which would be about six. The short services would not occupy you much more than ten minutes each. When you have attended the church services in the week, you might alter them as you see fit, not to overburden yourself."

"And if interruptions come?"

"Still endeavour to keep as near to the time fixed as you can. It is order and habit which your mind wants, Alice; something to strengthen it."

"But," said Alice, "my thoughts will never be fixed at such strange times. I shall be thinking of my work, or reading, or what I have just left off doing."

"A Christian," replied Mr. Clifford, "is bound to think upon God always; anything, therefore, which breaks in upon our worldly thoughts, and forces us to remember Him, must be most valuable."

"I shall not keep the rule," said Alice; "I never did yet in my life keep any rule for more than a few days together."

"Well! suppose it should be so; suppose you are tempted to break it, you can begin again. If you break it twenty times you can recommence it as often. It is not so much an effort of mind, dependent upon health and spirits, which is required at the first moment; it is an effort of the body; to rise from your seat, and leave your employment, and go to your own room."

"But," exclaimed Alice, "merely to do that will not be prayer."

"No, but it will be the first step towards it; it will be obedience, and by degrees the habit will recur as an instinct; whatever you may be doing, even when travelling or in company. The very striking of the clock will be a voice summoning you to God, and

you will learn to mark it by short prayers when you cannot do more."

"I will try to do as you say," replied Alice.

"Then, my love, I cannot have the slightest doubt of your success, and by-and-by your prayers will become a pleasure to you."

Alice looked up with a smile, but said that she was afraid that would never be the case, for she always felt dissatisfied with her prayers, as if she had not prayed for the people and things she ought, even when she tried to do so.

"Perhaps the examination of the Lord's Prayer will be a help to you," replied Mr. Clifford. "One thing it teaches us very clearly, that we are to think more of God than of ourselves. We shall see this if we study it well. We begin by calling Him 'Our Father;' and as children are always interested in a Father's honour, we pray next for His glory; that 'His name may be hallowed,' and 'His kingdom come.' Afterwards, there follow short petitions for ourselves: our bodily wants, the forgiveness of our sins, freedom from temptation and the snares of the evil one; and then again we recur to the thought of God's Majesty. This is not like our usual notion of what prayer should be, is it Alice?"

"No," answered Alice, "and it seems impossible not to think of ourselves first."

"The perfection of religion is love," replied Mr. Clifford; "and a very perfect Christian, loving His Saviour intensely, would long that His name might be hallowed, and His kingdom come, more than for any earthly blessing. But I am not going to speak to you particularly about this now, because I think you are not likely to enter into it; and of course much of our time must be spent in confession, and asking for help. I mentioned it chiefly to suggest what we are apt to forget, that intercession should

form a chief part of our prayers, because by it we promote the glory of God."

"There are such a number of persons to pray for," said Alice, "I cannot remember them all, and then I grow tired and think it very troublesome."

"Did you ever see Bishop Andrews' form of intercession? There is one for the Wednesday which might be used in two parts, at the two short services I mentioned for twelve and six o'clock. In the morning and evening you might content yourself with mentioning your particular relations and friends, and using the Lord's Prayer for all Christians. Only I would beg you to try and bring vividly before your mind the persons you are praying for; imagine them, as it were, standing by you to be interceded for. Short and numerous intercessions are apt to become a form if we do not watch ourselves. When they are real, they help us extremely in becoming charitable, and interested in persons about us."

"But there are other things besides intercession which are difficult," said Alice; "remembering all our faults is one."

"Yes, there again you require division. You have a general idea of your chief faults; perhaps it may be an assistance to you to take one of the most prominent, and make it an especial point of duty to guard against it."

"That will be having my own way," said Alice.

"Yes, a dislike to interference and government; this is particularly dangerous for you, my love, because it is the root of all your unhappiness with Lady Catharine. If you can once bring yourself to bend your will to hers, instead of wishing that she should bend hers to yours, your life will be very different from what it has been."

"It will be extremely difficult, I am afraid," said Alice.

"No doubt it will; and more so by and by than at present. Whilst you are an invalid, the object of every one is to pet you; but if it please God that you should grow strong again, you must prepare to bear the roughnesses of life."

"Yes, I know," said Alice, sighing.

"Then look at the case bravely, my dear child. Submission is your duty; thorough submission in all things, small as well as great, and to wishes as well as commands. Lady Catharine stands in the place of a parent. There is no duty more imperatively commanded than that of unresisting obedience to our parents."

"I will try," said Alice, but the tone, though sincere, was doubtful.

"Try and yet make up your mind not to be disheartened by failures. Only keep a constant watch. When you go to your noonday prayers, for instance, look back upon what has passed since breakfast time, and see how often you have been wilful; the recollection of one fault will bring back others; and you may enquire also whether you have been vain, idle, selfish, hasty, and so on. It will take less time than you think, and a short general confession and petition for help, perhaps only the verse of a Psalm, will, you may be sure, be accepted if sincere. So again at six o'clock, the same plan may be adopted. In that case your self-examination at night will be much easier, and you will not be induced to give it up, or hurry over it, by sleep or fatigue. You had better not give yourself more duty of the kind than you can help at night; rest, especially at your age, is very essential, and sitting up late prevents early rising, and makes the whole day go wrong."

"Still, I shall only have a confused notion, I am afraid," said Alice.

"Then perhaps to help you, it may not be amiss

to make a memorandum of the principal faults you have noticed in yourself at these times of self-examination; only let them be made simply and shortly, without any expressions of feeling that may tend to vanity and self-consciousness, and from time to time destroyed. Perhaps it would be well to keep them for a week, and look them over every Friday, which is the day especially appointed for confession and humiliation. And, my love," continued Mr. Clifford, "I think you will find these outward rules of use; but I hope I need not urge upon you, that if you were to begin them now, and continue them unbroken till the day of your death, they must be worse than useless without the aid of the Spirit of God, and the devotion of your secret heart."

"You have not told me about thanksgiving," said Alice; "but I should like to be helped in that too."

"I have said little about it," replied Mr. Clifford, "because it is the first part of our prayers likely to become a pleasure to us; you will soon find it make you happy to remember, besides, the infinite blessings which are common to us all, the little pleasures and peculiar mercies you have enjoyed yourself in the day, and to say that you are grateful for them. It will make you realize, perhaps more than anything, that God is your Friend."

Alice sighed deeply.

"You sigh, my dear child; you distrust yourself, why should you? or rather why should you not trust to God?"

"Because I have tried, and always gone back," said Alice.

"Then try again; pray again; above all, Alice, make up your mind to receive the Holy Communion the very first opportunity which is offered you: and never, except from absolute necessity, omit it. How

greatly it will be the means of strengthening you it will be impossible for you to imagine."

"The service is so solemn," said Alice. "When I have practised the rules some time perhaps I shall be more fit. I am sure now I shall never feel as I ought."

"You make the common mistake, my love, and a very great one it is. You measure fitness by feeling, and the benefits of the Holy Communion by the amount of your own goodness. God, on the contrary, sees us all unfit, all sinful. Still He says, 'Come.' Sorrow for the past, sincerity of purpose for the future, and an honest, childlike faith, are the wedding garments required. If I did not think you possessed these, Alice, I should say as I did before, wait; but wait not only for the Holy Communion, but for your confirmation. Do not go before God with a double mind. Do not dare to make Him a promise which in your heart you do not intend to perform."

Alice answered humbly, "I think I intend to perform it."

"Then, dear child, trust that intention to God. He will keep what you commit to Him; and whenever you are inclined to be disheartened, go to Him and commit it to Him again. I mean this literally. I could tell you, Alice, of instances in which persons with most serious natural faults—faults, perhaps, of all others the most difficult to cure, have been placed in circumstances likely to foster them to the utmost,—so much so, that any one looking at the case would say that they could not escape; and I have known the persons themselves to be actually frightened at their position, from a sense of their own powerlessness; and yet, after committing themselves entirely to God and asking Him to save them; finding them-

selves saved, they knew not how ; not merely enabled to battle with temptation, but in a measure unconscious of its power."

"I know faults can be conquered," said Alice.

"Yes, but these faults were not conquered ; they remained still in the disposition, and showed themselves on other occasions, though, of course, they were carefully guarded against ; but the strange thing is, that in the peculiar case in which the danger seemed so imminent, they were comparatively unfelt. These instances are as plain answers to prayer, as clear interpositions of God in our behalf, as the curing of a physical disease would be. I mention them just to show what help you have at hand at all moments. The very instability of your disposition may be converted into a blessing, if it should teach you to throw yourself more fully upon God."

Alice looked happier and more hopeful ; yet she could not bring herself to say what Mr. Clifford wished. He asked her again whether she could now agree to his proposal. She would think, she said ; she would let him know.

"But, my love, are there any more reasons ? Is there anything you have not told me ?"

"No, nothing, except—"

"Except what ?"

"Except that I am afraid, and that I shall not keep my thoughts properly fixed, and that my feelings are always so cold in church ;—everything distracts me."

"Very likely ; some persons do find it more difficult to keep up their attention properly in church than in private : these are individual peculiarities ; they do not affect the great question of our sincerity."

"But it will be very wicked not to attend then ?" said Alice.

"Not to try to attend, and not to care about it would be very wicked," replied Mr. Clifford ; "but

you must be prepared to find your thoughts wander ; it may be even more than usual when you are to engage for the first time in such a very solemn service. The sense of novelty—the uncertainty as to what you are exactly to do—physical nervousness—all these things will tend to disturb you—perhaps to make you quite cold ; but these are not true tests of our condition or our acceptance. And when you are conscious of them, do not try to work yourself up to a state of excitement ; pray that you may be assisted ; and instead of thinking of yourself, think of your Saviour ; think of those parts of the Gospel which speak of His sufferings, and endeavour, if you can, to realize them ; or read some of the prophetic Psalms ; go out of yourself as much as you can ; try to forget whether you are feeling much or little ; and remember, the question for self-examination will be, how you endeavour to prepare for your infinite privilege ; to keep up the remembrance of it, and to struggle against your faults afterwards. The first little act of self-denial, when you return home, done with a special remembrance that you have been a partaker of the Holy Communion, will, as it were, stamp the act upon your heart.”

“And when I have to go again, I shall never think I have prepared myself properly,” said Alice.

“You will find the preparation comparatively easy ; if you can keep steadily to the rules I mentioned just now,” said Mr. Clifford. “Self-examination will be a light task when it is so constantly performed ; though it will be right, at such seasons, to take a larger view of your conduct, and see if you can discover any marked progress from one month to another. You may also read with attention particular parts of the Bible, such as our Saviour’s sermon on the mount, St. Paul’s exhortations to the Romans, in the 12th chapter of his Epistle ; or to the Ephesians

in the 4th, 5th, and 6th chapters; or, again, the description of charity in the 13th chapter of the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, and compare your conduct with the laws laid down in them. But I do not advise you to add very much to your usual reading and prayers at these times. I think you would find it better rather to make alterations in those to which you are accustomed. Instead, for instance, of using the short services exactly as they are put down in Bishop Cosin's Devotions, to choose other Psalms, or to fix upon other prayers more peculiarly suitable; remembering that although it is most needful to recollect our own offences, it is quite as much, if not more so, to dwell upon the mercy purchased for us by our Saviour's sufferings. The more we can think of Him, the safer and happier we shall be. I do not mean to imply from what I have said, that special, lengthened preparation is not good. When persons have but little leisure for devotion generally, it is most necessary; but I would rather spread your preparation over a longer space of time;—in fact, teach you to feel that you were always prepared."

"Or never prepared," said Alice, with a faint smile.

"Never prepared," repeated Mr. Clifford, emphatically. "You are right, Alice; it is 'never prepared;' that we must feel more and more.—But, my love, we stand upon the same ground there. Have you anything else to say?"

"Nothing; not that I can remember, only—"

"Only you will consent, my own dear child; you will not draw back again?" Alice held out her hand in token of assent. He took it in one of his, and laying the other upon her head, said: "May God bless you and keep you, my child; and give you peace both now and evermore."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE deep-toned bells of Laneton Church pealed joyfully on the morning of the Confirmation. Early, quite early, when the sun had but lately risen upon the earth, they poured forth their hallowed greeting, summoning many a young heart to wake from the dreams of earth, and prepare for the warfare of eternity.

Ruth was among the first to rise—to remember that a solemn day at length was come, and to make an effort for its proper celebration. And Madeleine had no wish to linger in indolence. The watchword for that day, and for the whole future of their lives, was to be—energy. “Whatsoever thy heart findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest.” It was a quiet, silent energy which was required now; to keep in mind the remembrance of the vows they were about to renew; and to prevent their thoughts from being distracted by the unusual excitement in the village, by the arrival of the Bishop, and all the attendant interest of a ceremony comparatively rare. These are the real trials of all such occasions, and Ruth was pained to find how much they disturbed her. But all was forgotten, when at length she found herself with Madeleine in the church, and no longer called upon to give heed to anything save the duty before her. One thought alone drew her attention occasionally aside, when her eye wandered to a distant spot, where Alice

sat apart, leaning against a cushion, and supported by Lady Catharine.

Poor Alice! she looked very ill on that morning, but she did not cry; and she sat perfectly still, without once looking up. She seemed scarcely to have the power to seek herself for a blessing; only she was humble, and penitent, and willing to receive it. The sight of her caused Ruth a sharp pang. All her mistakes and errors rose up before her with renewed self-reproach; and when she thought of the promise to be made, her heart misgave her with the doubt whether it could ever be performed. But it was too late then to draw back, and Ruth did not really wish it. She was learning to trust herself to a Higher Power; to trust as simply as Madeline, whose face bore the grave but exquisitely sweet expression of one about to be placed in a position of new and untried responsibility, and full of resolution and hope, because loving too much to fear that she should ever be forsaken.

Yes; it is pleasant, it is a real happiness, to bow ourselves to the service of One to whom our hearts are given. If there is delight in the devotion of a wife to her husband; if there is a proud satisfaction in loyalty, or a pure enthusiasm in patriotism; surely also, there is a higher, a more ennobling happiness in offering ourselves to our Saviour, in pledging ourselves to be the faithful soldiers and servants of Christ, even to our life's end.

The service proceeded, differing but little from the usual form. A short question was asked, a still shorter answer given—and the act was over.

So it is often in this world; we speak for a moment—we promise for eternity. Then Ruth, and Madeline, and Alice, knelt together to be blessed. And what a blessing it was which they received! Strengthening and inspiring; full of hope for a

daily increase of happiness upon earth—of rest in the eternal kingdom of glory. Ruth's tears fell fast, but peacefully. The prospect of heavenly aid was the only trust of a contrite spirit. And Alice's hands shook as she held by the altar rail, trying to understand where she was, and what she was doing; and whilst distressed at her bewildered feelings, still satisfied with the sense of performing a duty; and Madeline, self-possessed in manner and tranquilly happy, forgot her own powerlessness as the eagerness of fervent resolution melted into the quiet rest of undoubting faith.

When the service was ended, Alice was carried back to the Manor, watched with inexpressible tenderness by Lady Catharine; and Ruth and Madeline returned to the Parsonage, to receive that warm, fond kiss of a parent's love, the remembrance of which, when the reality is beyond our reach, we must bear with an aching longing to our grave.

They spent the evening together at the Manor. Ruth and Madeline were alone with Alice when the clock struck nine. They had fallen into a conversation which interested them—a recollection of school days. Ruth noticed the hour, and Madeline said she could not have imagined it half as late. Alice rose instantly.

"Good night, dears," she said. "I must go. It is my bed-time now, till I get well."

"Must you indeed?"

"Yes; Lady Catharine wishes it."

No one said a word more. Alice put on her shawl, and went to find Lady Catharine. She met her on the stairs.

"I was coming to look for you, my love. I did not like to disturb you; but it is best to be particular."

"I heard the clock strike," said Alice, "and I

knew it would be best to go. I came to wish you good night."

"Dear child! it seems very hard you should be interrupted; but you must grow strong again."

"It is not so very hard," said Alice; "and I like to please you," she added, as she held up her face to be kissed.

"And what did Ruth and Madeline say?" asked Lady Catharine, whilst she wrapped Alice's shawl more closely round her throat, to keep her from the draught on the stairs.

"Nothing, when they knew it was right."

"Lady Catharine smiled, and answered, "God bless you, my child, and them too!" and Alice went away.

Sunday came—bright as the day of Confirmation; but quiet, like other Sundays. Some days and some feelings are not to be described. Words are human and imperfect; feelings, the purest and the best, are the gift of the Spirit of God.

If sincerity and humbleness of heart are acceptable in the sight of Heaven, then were Alice, and Ruth, and Madeline accepted when they knelt to receive their first Communion. It was a moment full of deep awe—of a sense of incomprehensible mercy—of hopes scarcely understood—of privileges too great to be realized; a season, the blessedness of which was perceived in remembrance, rather than in its reality.

Others, more advanced in their Christian course, could better comprehend it—at least could be more grateful for it—most especially the parents, who then saw themselves bound to their precious children by the most hallowed of all ties; and she, the widow, once desolate, who read in that solemn act the pledge that the one treasure of her life should be hers for ever in heaven.

"Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man,

and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

Ruth, and Madeline, and Alice, were now fully Christians. They were to begin life for themselves.

We may think that it would be well to follow them farther; we may desire to know how it fared with them in that long and dangerous journey; we may feel some wish to know the period of their probation upon earth; and where, after the toil and the conflict were ended, they were laid to rest in their last calm sleep.

But the future is sometimes to be read by the past, not indeed perfectly, yet sufficiently. They who give themselves to God in their youth, will be protected by Him to their old age. We may picture Alice to ourselves as still struggling against the inherent faults of her character; sometimes fretted by interruption, sometimes inclined to rebel against authority; but we may be certain that the principle within must rise superior to all such evil; and we may imagine the Manor to be still occasionally dull, and Lady Catharine inclined to be strict, but love and obedience will by degrees melt even the most firmly fixed habits, and Lady Catharine Hyde's deep affection, and consciousness of her own imperfection, might well be trusted to ensure Alice's happiness.

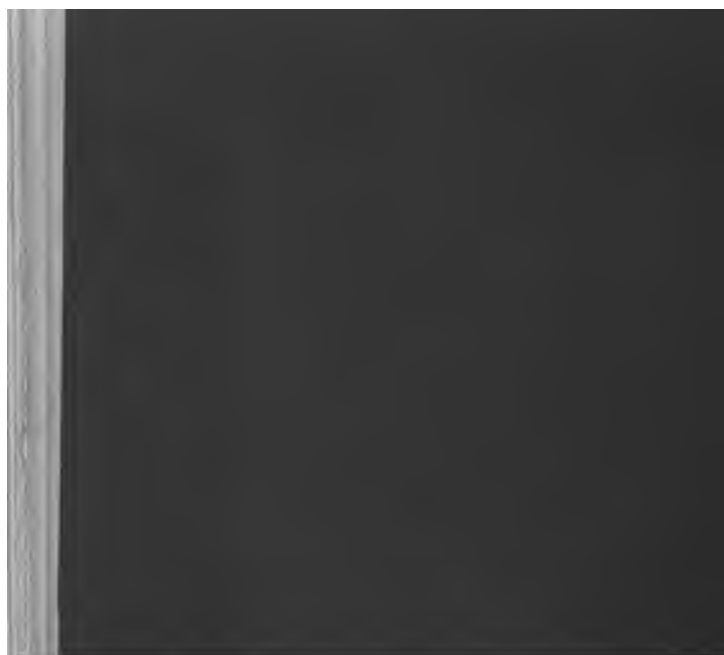
And at the Parsonage,—with Mr. and Mrs. Clifford, and Madeline, and Ruth,—it can scarcely be difficult to prophesy something of the course of after-years. We may surely foresee the unwearying energy with which Ruth would labour to correct her hidden faults; how she would pray, and strive, and watch; and when overtaken by sin, repent and strive

again ; and pursue the straightforward path, under the remembrance of the time when, in by-gone years, she had wandered from it into error ; and how the clear stream of Madeline's Christian life would flow onwards to the end, even as it had so early begun, disturbed, it might be, for one moment, by the pollutions of earth, but the next reflecting untroubled the hues of heaven.

Such as they were in life such would they be in death. May God in His mercy grant that the history of their early years may not have been written in vain.

THE END.

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